

***“Navigating Uncharted Waters”:
Lived Experiences of Novice Principals Leading
in Deprived School Contexts***

By

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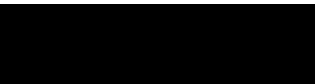
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February 2023

DECLARATION

I, **Nokukhanya Ndlovu**, declare that:

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Professor Phumlani Myende

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“One of the most vital ways we sustain ourselves is by building communities of resistance, places where we know we are not alone” (hooks, 2014, p. 227).

My gang is my community of resistance: my family, friends, colleagues, and mentors who have stood by me and with me as I navigated the uncharted waters of doing this Doctoral work amidst rogue waves¹. I began this work during a precarious time in my personal and professional life. I was going through a divorce. While contending with this rogue wave, I later had an unfortunate turn of job insecurity, forcing me to leave my job in KZN. This shattered me because even though I was on contract, for once in my life, I felt I was within² and on a path toward a trajectory that would hold greater prospects for me. I took on a six-month contract in Zululand, where I had never been. It ended as abruptly as it had begun, and I was fortunate to find permanent employment in Gauteng province after the contract period. The new context was toxic. Amongst other things, what challenged me the most was being told that in this space, because of the work demands, you will never complete your PhD. We were advised to instead start on a new project that would align with our new roles and work. I was not willing to do this. I was fortunate to get appointed to my previous job permanently and moved back to KZN. I was happy, and to be honest, it was once I returned that I could engage in this project. Fast forward, I was part of a programme going to Columbia University, and as we were starting to transition into our stay Covid -19 happened, and we had to return. The looting in KZN and the floods were the other rogue waves that have happened, numbing me and, at times, disabling me because of the impact of the trauma and danger that has come with them. One thing was on my mind: I had to survive and complete this project.



When I was down and out, the gang was there. The gang was there when I was crippled by anxiety, fear, and self-doubt. The gang was there when I felt like an imposter in the academy. The gang was there when I wanted to vent, laugh, or be silent. The gang was there when I needed space to work. The gang was my emotional, financial, and spiritual anchor. They crawled with me, walked, and sprinted with me. In the

¹ Rogue waves are large waves that have the potential to disable and sink large ships and oil rigs.

² Within is a colloquial term used in South Africa that refers to belonging in something or among a group of people.

I want to make a special mention of the gang masterminds:

To Prof Msibi. Thank you for all the opportunities you have provided for me. Thank you for your words of wisdom and encouragement. Ngiyabonga Prof Malume!

Nokukhanya: *I had previously been employed on a fixed-term contract and had then left. So many memories had been made in my absence. The excitement of my return was soon shadowed by feelings of anxiety, confusion, and pressure of the academy. “I think we should do an AERA presentation. We can also write papers from this?” When this suggestion was posed, I asked, “Am I part of this ‘we’?” In retrospect, I now know, that was a point of validation for me. From feeling like an impostor, I started to feel like “I was within.”*

Mbatha et al. (2020, p. 38)

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ABSTRACT

Moving into a leadership position can be daunting. In modern-day schools, the leadership role comes with multiple responsibilities and is attached to high levels of accountability. Arguably so, today's principals are called CEOs as they have to lead and manage complex organisations and perform managerial, instructional, and political roles. Such an undertaking is challenging, especially for novice principals who assume this position with limited leadership experience and lack formal leadership training. Additionally, schools are located in different contexts, and the context influences leadership. Some schools are located in contexts that are conducive for those who are principals to lead and navigate leadership challenges successfully. Others are situated in contexts that are deprived. Deprived contexts are post-Apartheid geographies where numerous factors conspire to diminish the quality of life, making leading and working in these contexts more challenging compared to other contexts. Most schools in South Africa are located in deprived contexts. This means several novice principals get appointed to lead in such contexts amidst the limited training and sometimes experience in principalship.

This study explored novice principals' lived experiences of leading schools in deprived contexts through a theoretical lens that integrates sense-making, adaptive leadership, and context-responsive theories. It intended to understand the identities of novice principals (who are the principals leading schools located in the context of deprivation), how they enacted leadership, and why they lead in the ways they do.

Four novice principals leading schools in deprived contexts from the province of KwaZulu-Natal were selected. Guided by the narrative methodology, which relies on storytelling and narrating to understand the complexity of human experience, life history interviews were used to generate data. From the dual analysis, namely narrative analysis and analysis of narratives, the study found that interestingly, the leadership practices of the novice principals in this study are not that different from those of other seasoned and successful principals. The practices that emerged were working collaboratively through building relationships, strengthening the instructional core, leading by example, wearing many hats by using and drawing on their multiple personal and professional identities, being active policy enactors and leading with the context in mind through a leadership of care. This suggests that novice principals do not assume their role as blank slates, whether formally trained or not.

Childhood, educational, and professional experiences emerged as powerful socialising agents that cultivated leadership identities even before novice principals were appointed and were highly significant in shaping the leadership of principals. Additionally, the novice principals led in the ways they do as a response to the contextual constraints posed by the context in which they lead, demonstrating contextual awareness. This study further found that this contextual awareness arose from being socialised in a similar environment to that in which these novice principals lead. While current scholarship asserts that principals shape and are shaped by the contexts they lead, this study extends knowledge by illustrating that the novice principals have contextual literacy, which cultivates contextual awareness, guiding leadership practices.

From this, we learn that novice principals are not deterred by the challenges of being new; instead, they proactively seek creative ways to empower themselves and navigate the complexities of both their new role and the deprived context. Moreover, we discover that the context of being a novice principal in a deprived setting holds distinct meanings for those who are insiders (the novice principals leading in the deprived context) compared to outsiders (such as the researcher exploring the phenomenon). The novice principals perceive themselves as transformative agents, strategically positioned to challenge systemic constraints and find innovative solutions to navigate, transform, and thrive in this challenging and prejudiced context. Their experiences and these findings challenge conventional assumptions about novice principals and provide valuable insights into their resilience and capacity to lead effectively in demanding circumstances.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AALDP	Accelerated Academic Leadership Development Programme
AP	Acting Principal
BCom	Bachelor of Commerce
BEd	Bachelor of Education
CAO	Central Applications Office
CES	Chief Educational Specialist (Umhloli)
DBE	Department of Basic Education
DH	Departmental Head
DP	Deputy Principal
KZN	KwaZulu-Natal
NI	Narrative Inquiry
NP	Novice Principal
NSNP	National School Nutrition Programme
PFMA	Public Finance Management Act
PL1	Post Level One Teacher
PPN	Post Provisioning Norms
NY	New York
SASA	South African Schools Act
SASSA	South African Social Security Agency
SA-SAMS	SA School Administration and Management System
SASP	South African Standards for Principalship
SES	Socioeconomic Status
SGB	School Governing Body

SMT School Management Team

TC Teachers College

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CHAPTER ONE

THE SEA ROAD FOR THE MAIDEN VOYAGE

1.1 Introduction

Welcome to the harbour as we prepare to sail on a maiden voyage to an unknown terrain. My participants are novice principals, on their first assignment, tasked with captaining and leading schools located in deprived contexts. In this thesis, I narrate the tales of my participants' voyage. This chapter serves as the sea road, the route of this tale, pinpointing the coordinates of this thesis. Driven and motivated by the methodology (narrative inquiry) adopted in exploring the participants' voyage, this thesis is themed with metaphors as headings. Metaphors are a creative way to evoke and capture the imagination (Badley, 2020; Sword, 2012). They texture the writing, enriching the telling of tales by simultaneously informing, engaging, amusing, or intriguing the reader (Badley, 2020).

I write this thesis in a scholarly personal narrative style. I draw from Nash (2004), where I include many personal stories and experiences. I use formal and informal writing and retain vernacular language and expressions in some parts (Nash, 2004). As Nash (2004, p. 8) suggests, I use the above ways of expression to speak of the "real world that each of us narrativizes, the storied world that each of us inhabits."

This chapter provides the background of the study giving a broad gaze and highlighting the significance of school leadership, the experiences of novice principals, and the challenges of leading in deprived school contexts. The statement of the problem will then be presented, focusing on the unique challenges faced by novice principals in such contexts. The research puzzles guiding this study will be outlined, followed by the rationale for the study. This chapter will also summarize the chapters covered throughout the thesis, providing context for the reader and setting the stage for the in-depth exploration of the experiences of novice principals in deprived school contexts. I now lower the anchor by providing the background to the study, a significant element of the tale yet to unfold.

1.2 Background to the Study

There is consensus that leadership is a significant contributing factor influencing quality teaching and learning, which is essential for school improvement and effectiveness⁴. Overall, scholars such as Bush (2007), Day et al. (2020), Harris (2004), Leithwood et al. (2004), Louis et al. (2010), and Leithwood et al. (2020) agree with the idea that quality leadership makes a significant contribution to school outcomes and subsequently to learner achievement. Contemporary research (Day et al., 2020; Daniëls et al., 2020; Hitt & Tucker, 2016; Leithwood et al., 2020; Robinson, 2019) has placed much focus on the importance of the role of the principal, continuing the ongoing conversation in the discourse around leadership in schools and its influence on school improvement and effectiveness.

In the South African context, the South African Standards for Principalship (SASP) policy outlines the role and responsibilities of principals and the competencies required to execute this role. The SASP stipulates that principals must lead and manage teaching and learning, shape the school's direction, develop and empower themselves and others, work with and for the community, manage human resources, and advocate for extra-mural activities (DBE, 2014). Furthermore, the SASP stipulates that principals must exercise five main kinds of leadership to execute their roles and responsibilities. These are strategic, executive, organizational, instructional, and cultural leadership (DBE, 2014). While the SASP is a local framework, these stipulations are not unique but benchmarked against global standards (Darling-Hammond et al., 2007; Day et al., 2020). Globally, the 21st-century principalship position is a specialist occupation (Bush et al., 2011).

While the principalship position requires expansive knowledge, multiple skills, variegated attitudes, and values, locally, the requirements are relatively lax. Appointable candidates require a teaching qualification and seven years of teaching experience (DBE, 2016). However, the local trend is that principals begin their careers as teachers, and through promotions from Post Level 1 (PL1) to Departmental Head (DH) to Deputy Principal (DP), they progress to principalship (Bush, 2016; Wills, 2015). Though this may be the prevailing trend, articulation across the different levels is not required.

⁴ (Bhengu et al., 2014; Bush, 2019; Bush et al., 2011; Christie et al., 2007; Day et al., 2020; DBE, 2014; Hitt & Tucker, 2016; Leithwood & Louis, 2012; Leithwood et al., 2020; Maringe et al., 2015; Mkhize & Bhengu 2013; Piggot-Irvin et al., 2013; Robinson, 2019)

According to Bush (2004; 2016), experience and teaching qualifications are inadequate preparation for the principalship role. Similarly, Mathibe (2007) states that teaching experience alone is insufficient to capacitate aspiring principals with the necessary skills and knowledges for principalship. In a recent study by Sepuru and Mohlakwana (2020) on novice principals in South Africa, the participating NPs reported that their experiences in post-level 1 (PL1), as Departmental Heads (DHs) and as Deputy Principals (DPs) were not enough to prepare them for school leadership. Arguably, the lack of stringent criteria and a specialised qualification requirement for appointing principals have adverse effects. Studies (Bush et al., 2011; Bush & Odura, 2006; Mestry, 2017; Webber et al., 2015) found that many principals lack the essential leadership and management skills acquired through training before and after their appointment. High-performing education systems invest heavily in leadership development and training, ensuring that school leaders are capacitated and developed into instructional leaders to serve as levers for school improvement (Harris et al., 2014; Mourshed et al., 2010). Various studies (Clarke & Wildy, 2013; Slater et al., 2018; Walker et al., 2013; Webber et al., 2014) affirm the positive relationship between formalised preparation approach and the education system's performance. However, Duke (1987) points out that, though these programmes have merit, the socialisation of principals is an ongoing process. While that may be the case, in South Africa, opportunities for leadership preparation are scarce, which may explain the poor performance of the local education sector (Teaching and Learning International Survey, 2018).

Another local phenomenon is the rising age profile of principals. In recent years, the age profile of principals has been rising, with an estimation of over 7000 new principals required to replace retiring principals between 2012 and 2017 (Wills, 2015). Wills (2015) states that patterns of principal distribution in South Africa have not changed, with less qualified and experienced principals appointed in poorer schools between quintiles one to three. The quintile ranking system ranks schools between one and five. The most disadvantaged schools are in the lower ranking, from one to three, and receive a greater share of government subsidy per learner (Mestry & Africa, 2020; van Dyk & White, 2019). These schools are also classified as no-fee paying schools. Schools in quintiles four and five have the autonomy to charge fees and receive a lower government subsidy per learner (Mestry & Africa, 2020; van Dyk & White, 2019). These schools can raise additional financial resources as they serve learners from more privileged and affluent backgrounds than their counterparts in the lower quintiles (Mestry & Africa, 2020; van Dyk & White, 2019).

Against this labour market turnover issue is the issue of differentiated contexts. The education sector in South Africa is described with a “two-nation metaphor” (Maringe et al., 2015, p. 364) or stated otherwise, as “a mixture of first and third-world institutions” (Chikoko et al., 2015, p. 452). On the one side, well-resourced and thriving schools are comparable to the best found in first-world countries (Chikoko et al., 2015). On the opposite side are primarily dysfunctional schools, which have no resemblance to their counterparts in terms of resources, staffing, infrastructure, and educational outcomes and opportunities (Chikoko et al., 2015; Fleisch, 2008). The latter schools are in deprived contexts.

According to Maringe and Moletsane (2015), more than three-quarters of schools in South Africa are dysfunctional and are in contexts with multiple deprivations. Contexts with multiple deprivations contend with numerous negative factors that collude in several ways to exacerbate poverty, thus diminishing the quality of life relative to what is deemed normal (Lumby, 2015; Maringe et al., 2015). As a result of multiple deprivations, leading schools in such contexts becomes more difficult and complex compared to leading in schools with less challenging circumstances (Maringe et al., 2015). Based on the rising age profile of principals, the number of schools in deprived contexts, and the trend of allocation, it is probable that principals in their early years of employment will be appointed in these dysfunctional schools located in deprived contexts.

As already alluded to, South African principals experience numerous hurdles in enacting their role. Leading in a school within a deprived context may add another load to their leadership, heavy for novice and seasoned principals alike. Novice principals (NPs) are individuals beginning their journey as principals, sometimes referred to as early career principals (Ng, 2015; Spillane & Lee, 2014; Spillane & Anderson, 2014). Daresh (2001) states that these are principals who have a maximum of three years in the principalship position. Novices are still at the induction stage (Mulford et al., 2007), transitioning into their new role (Daresh, 2001; Mulford et al., 2007; Spillane & Anderson, 2014). In this study, NPs refer to newly promoted principals who have served not more than three years in their positions as school principals. Scholarship⁵ around novice principals suggests that they experience personal and professional dilemmas, such as finding their leader identities, managing multiple tasks, and diverse

⁵ (Bolam et al., 2000; Clarke & Wildy, 2013; Daresh & Male, 2000; Liljenberg & Andersson, 2020; Mentz et al., 2010; Meyer & Patuawa, 2022; Ng, 2015; Sepura & Mohlakwana, 2020; Spillane & Lee, 2012; Spillane & Anderson, 2014; Swen, 2020; Tahir et al, 2017; Tuma & Spillane, 2019; Wieczorek & Manard, 2018)

stakeholder expectations. Being a novice principal is not smooth sailing, and the journey is bound to have turbulence in the presence of contextual challenges. One wonders how these NPs exercise and experience leadership in the contexts likely to make a leader face complexity in executing their roles, hence the focus of this study.

1.3 Statement of the Problem

The preceding discussions have highlighted several significant arguments. Firstly, leadership affects school effectiveness, and the nature of leadership can contribute to school failure or success (Bush, 2019; Day et al., 2020; Leithwood et al., 2020). Secondly, leading schools has become a specialist occupation that requires expert leadership and management skills (Bush et al., 2011). While this may be the case, within the South African context, requirements for such a position are lax, and, for the most part, novice principals do not possess the necessary skills to lead and manage schools effectively (Daresh & Male, 2000; Bush et al., 2011; Mestry, 2017; Webber et al., 2015). Moreover, many schools within the South African landscape are in contexts with multiple deprivations. In this geography, several challenges conspire, negatively affecting the lives of those who live and lead in them.

Thirdly, given the high prevalence of schools in multiple deprivations and the rising age profile of principals in quintiles one to three schools, novice principals (NPs) are most likely to be appointed in this context. From day one, these principals must effectively lead and manage schools while simultaneously navigating their new positions and dealing with the unique challenges faced by novice principals (Manuel, 2003). There is no allowance for their newness (Manuel, 2003). They have to work like all other principals in other contexts, with no additional support or special policy concessions, while theirs has multiple deprivations.

Despite the significance of this phenomenon, there is a lack of understanding of the experiences of novice principals leading in such contexts. Given the numerous factors highlighted above, there is a need to understand how they experience being beginning leaders and managers while simultaneously juggling the dilemmas of the context and their position as novice principals. “Navigating uncharted waters” refers to the maiden voyage the participants undertake. The waters are uncharted because they are novice principals. While others have taken this journey, it is unknown to them. This study seeks to illuminate the experiences of novice principals who lead in a context with multiple deprivations.

1.4 Research Puzzles

In narrative inquiry, research questions are called research puzzles. Clandinin (2013) states that, in this methodology, the questions are around a particular wonder, a puzzle with nuances and intricacies associated with human experience. The word puzzle captures the multifaceted, complex terrain of human experience explored in this study.

Main Research Puzzle:

What are the lived experiences of novice principals leading in a deprived school context?

Sub-Research Puzzles:

1) Who are the novice principals leading schools in the context of multiple deprivations?

This puzzle explored the lived experiences of novice principals leading schools in the context of multiple deprivations. It delved into their life stories, shedding light on who they were before their tenure and who they have become as they lead their schools. The aim was to understand their life histories and how these experiences have shaped and influenced them during the early stages of their leadership journey.

2) How do novice principals enact leadership in schools in the context of multiple deprivations?

This puzzle focused on examining the leadership practices of novice principals who lead schools in the context of multiple deprivations. Its goal was to uncover the range of leadership practices they use as they navigate leading in such contexts as novice principals.

3) Why do novice principals leading schools in the context of deprivation enact leadership in the way they do?

This puzzle aimed to explore the multitude of factors that influence and shape the leadership practices of novice principals who are leading schools in the context of multiple deprivations. The intention was to gain a comprehensive understanding of how contextual factors, the unique positionality of being a novice, and personal experiences collectively shape and influence their leadership practices.

1.5 Justifications for the Study

In line with the narrative inquiry methodology, the rationale presented reflects personal, practical, and theoretical justifications for this study (Clandinin, 2013). Personal justifications entail justifying the inquiry within the frame of personal experiences (Clandinin, 2013), looking to the self as the source of inspiration for the study. Practical justifications address how the study may shift or change practice, school leadership, or the newly appointed principals' preparation. At the same time, the theoretical justification demonstrates how the study may contribute to new or existing knowledge and theory (Clandinin, 2013).

In looking at my personal and professional justifications, I use my collage to tell the story of what has brought me to this study. I first provide the whole collage. Individual images (from the collage) aligned to the different plots, which speak to my personal and professional inclinations, are then used in the various sections.

Figure 1.1 Nokukhanya's Collage



1.5.1 Personal Justifications

I come from a big family. I adored my father in my early childhood, a relationship that was later strained as I moved to my teenage years. In my early years, my father had several businesses, which he lost after he suffered multiple strokes. Our life changed. My mother, a teacher, did her best to take care of us, investing in our education to secure our future. She is a true matriarch and has been the glue that has kept us together.



After I completed Grade 12, I went to university, experiencing a hurdle in my final year of registration. I lost the use of my legs and had to suspend my studies. It was a trying time. I was devastated, seeing my life crumble between my eyes. It pushed me to a state of depression as I watched my friends graduate, find employment, and the world continue while I was stuck, immobile, with no future and prospects.



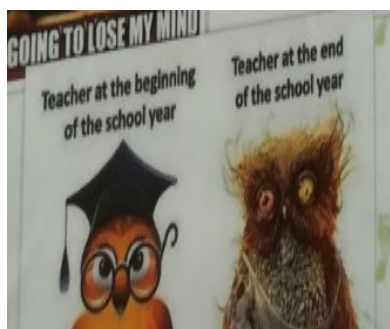
I had always projected my life with timelines, and this period disturbed my plans. After two years at home in a wheelchair, I returned to complete my degree. I finally finished my degree, and while looking for employment, life happened. I fell in love. My boyfriends' father was a principal and asked if I would come for an interview for a temporary post as I was still job hunting.

That is how teaching found me. It was never my first choice. It fell in love with me, and I with it. My enrolment (PGCE to the Masters) was driven by the need to learn more about the profession, sharpen my pedagogical expertise, and also have the capacity to respond to the complex social ills my learners were experiencing. This excerpt is from a co-authored paper (not from the PhD) where I reflected on this experience.

In my first year as a teacher and student-teacher, I was confronted with various troubling and horrific experiences. A learner confided in me that her mother's boyfriend was abusing her sexually. I did not know how to deal with this. I told my departmental head, and she cautioned that I not get involved. While trying to find a way forward, a couple of days after the learner had disclosed this, her mother came to my class and threatened me. She told me to stop minding her business and that her child was a liar making false accusations. Another experience relates to a learner who identified as a girl but was assigned male at birth. She would also stand whenever there was a call for girls to stand. The class would erupt in laughter and ridicule towards her, with others telling her to sit down. On numerous occasions, she confided in me that other teachers were forcing her to be what she is not, and some teachers were also part of the ridiculing and discouraging comments. In retrospect, my PGCE did not empower me to deal with the situations I have mentioned and those that I will further mention below. I have relied on the knowledge acquired through my research. I have also relied on my past experiences as a student and the values instilled in me by my family.

(Msiza & Ndlovu, 2021, p. 217)

All of these experiences weighed on me, shocked and confused me. I was shocked that I was



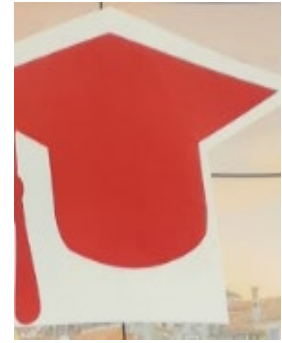
not interviewed when I came for an interview. Instead, I was introduced to the Departmental Head, who gave me a textbook and sent me to class to start teaching. She did not ask about my experience or qualifications. I was shocked by the lack of support for novice teachers. I was confused by the precarity of my school. The gates were always open, with no security personnel, making way for easy accessibility. But mostly, I was taken aback by my learners' socioeconomic circumstances and living conditions. This weighed heavily on me. This context was a sharp contrast from my earlier encounters as a student, and it made me pause and reflect on what I thought was poverty. Given the change in my family, I thought I knew poverty. In this new space, I realised how little I knew.



As a novice teacher, I found myself simultaneously contending with two forces. On the one hand, was the issue of my professional capital. According to Hargreaves and Fullan (2013), professional capital encompasses three streams. The first is human capital which is the talent of individuals (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2013). The second is social capital which

pertains to the collective power of a group (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2013). Lastly is decisional capital, described as “the wisdom and expertise to make sound judgments about learners and cultivated over many years” (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2013, p. 37). While I believed I had the human capital, I knew I was deficient in my social and decisional capital. I felt this deficiency was due to my lack of training and experience in the new context and the professional community I had entered. On the other hand, environmental factors were not conducive to facilitating effective teaching and learning. I was troubled by this, so I asked questions and sought advice. To my dismay, I received backlash – being told that I was wet behind the ears and this is how it had always been here, and this is how it would always be.

I decided to upgrade my qualifications by enrolling for a PGCE, Honours, and a Master's degree in education. I wanted to learn. I wanted to evolve. I wanted to be a good teacher. I did learn. I did grow, but I do not know if I ever became the teacher I wanted to be. The challenges of the context were still relentless. My mother served as my mentor throughout my years, assisting me in navigating my role and keeping afloat to survive.



The experiences I shared above highlight the challenges I faced as a post-level one (PL1) novice teacher, as I constantly grappled with various contextual issues beyond the classroom that impacted my work. It became evident that dealing with these contextual challenges was indeed a challenge in itself. I found myself drawing upon my past experiences, sifting through them to separate the toxic ones from the empowering ones. It became necessary for me to constantly negotiate with myself, the context I was in, and my role as a teacher.

These personal experiences led me to contemplate the experiences of individuals appointed not only to teach but also to lead and manage schools that are faced with numerous challenges. I became curious about the life histories of principals who carry the responsibility of leading schools that present complexities for leadership. Considering the complexity and responsibility associated with being a principal, I became even more inquisitive about how novice principals navigate leadership in such challenging contexts and why they adopt specific approaches.

These reflections and questions have motivated me to embark on this work to understand the identities of these principals, how the intersection of their novice positionality and the context of multiple deprivations shape their leadership, and the underlying reasons behind how they lead. Through this research, I hope to shed light on the experiences of these principals and gain insights into their unique leadership journeys.

1.5.2 Practical Justifications

When I started my teaching career, I was in the same school as my father-in-law. This proximity allowed me to enquire thoroughly about his work and experience. He had 30 years of service, had been appointed as a principal from inception into the profession, and always led schools in deprived contexts. Reflecting on his tenure, he commented that the issue of context remained a challenge to his leadership, and not much traction has been made to circumvent the contextual challenges that negatively impact schooling in this context.

Seeing the contextual constraints still being experienced and acknowledged by a seasoned principal, I conversed with some of my former colleagues who had recently been appointed principals in schools located in deprived contexts. They felt like they had just been thrown into the deep end. They were in underperforming schools and expected to turn them around miraculously without support. Lumby (2015) posits that leading and managing schools with multiple deprivations places unrealistic professional and community expectations of what can be achieved and puts an insurmountable amount of pressure on principals as they may be held responsible for failing.

Novice principals leading in deprived schools experience a unique ecosystem leveraged by the context and their newness. It is thus essential to understand the lived experiences of novice principals who, in their first appointment, face the task of leading in a school context with known challenges while transitioning into their leadership role. By understanding the experiences of these principals, I believe I could create space for reflections that are likely to inform the country's policy stance around appointments, mentoring, and induction of principals. The experiences of these principals were also sought as I believed they are likely to positively inform the enactment of leadership by other newly appointed principals.

1.5.3 Theoretical Justifications

In South Africa, most public schools are in deprived contexts and labelled dysfunctional (Maringe & Moletsane, 2015). The likelihood of novice principals resuming their role in these schools is high, as is the possibility that these principals will experience various challenges leveraged by the context and their positionality. Presently, there is a Rural Education Policy draft that, in its classification of rurality, includes deprived schools (DBE, 2017). "The policy aims to address the isolation, disconnectedness, shame, and distrust, as well as the lack of development often associated with rural communities and schools" (DBE, 2017, p. 13). However, this is yet to be implemented. Given the challenges, it may take time to achieve its goals, even upon implementation.

Scholarship⁶ on the leadership experiences of principals leading deprived schools is still in its infancy. Maringe and Moletsane (2015) have noted that the idea of multiple deprivations is relatively fresh in education. As a result, "its application as a research framing tool in education

⁶ (Bayeni, 2018; Bhengu & Myende, 2016; Bhengu & Mkhize, 2018; Chikoko et al., 2015; Dzimiri, 2018; Faulkner, 2015; Lumby, 2015; Maringe et al., 2015; Maringe & Moletsane, 2015; Mkhize & Bhengu, 2018; Moletsane et al., 2015; Myende, 2018; Myende et al., 2021; Naicker, 2018)

is relatively recent “(Maringe & Moletsane, 2015, p. 347). This may be one of the factors influencing the scarcity of literature. Additionally, few studies (Faulkner, 2015; Myende et al., 2021) have looked at the phenomenon through an approach similar to that adopted in this study.

Studies⁷ on novice principals have explored the challenges and dilemmas, successful financial management practices, identity work novice principals undertake as they transition into their roles and the perspectives of NPs on their roles as school leaders. However, literature from the Global South on this topic is still scarce. Even fewer studies have used self-reflexive methodologies (Blose et al., 2022) or focused on deprived contexts in their investigations. This research is timely, given the high prevalence of schools in such contexts. This study presents an opportunity to contribute to the scarce body of knowledge and illuminate the intersectional experiences of novice principals leading schools in a context with multiple deprivations.

1.6 Clearing the Readers’ Vision: Clarifying Key Concepts

1.6.1 Leadership

The concept of leadership is multifaceted and holds various perspectives (Hoy & Miskel, 2013; Leithwood et al., 1999). It is subjective and lacks a definitive definition (Yukl, 2010). According to Bush (2019), leadership is a process that involves influencing others to accomplish specific objectives. Similarly, Leithwood and Riehl (2004) argue that leadership is a process of influence where an individual can mobilize the support of others to achieve organizational goals. Hoy and Miskel (2013) define leadership as a social process wherein an individual or a group influences the actions of others towards shared goals. Moreover, these scholars suggest that leadership is distributed across formal and informal channels within organizations. Building upon these perspectives, this study understands leadership as a process of influence and a collective practice in which individuals or a group of people exert influence to achieve common organizational goals.

1.6.2 Novice Principals

Novice principals are sometimes referred to as early-career, new, or beginner principals (Ng, 2015; Oplatka, 2012; Sepuru & Mohlakwana, 2020; Spillane & Lee, 2014). Daresh (2001)

⁷ (Blose et al., 2022; Bolam et al., 2000; Daresh & Male, 2000; Kitavi & van der Westhuizen, 1997; Kouhsari & Bush, 2020; Liljenberg & Andersson, 2020; Meyer & Patuawa, 2022; Myende et al., 2018; Ng, 2015; Sepura & Mohlakwana, 2020; Spillane & Lee, 2012; Spillane & Anderson, 2014; Swen, 2020; Tahir et al, 2017; Tuma & Spillane, 2019; Wieczorek & Manard, 2018)

and Oplatka (2012) state that these are principals who have a maximum of three years in the principalship position. Drawing from Day and Bakioglu (1996), novice principals are still in the initiation phase. NPs are still in the induction phase during initiation, transitioning into their new role (Daresh, 2001; Mulford et al., 2007; Spillane & Andersson, 2014). They are learning their leadership responsibilities and understanding the complexities of leadership and the context in which they lead so they can align new initiatives and aspirations within the existing frameworks, structures, and culture (Day & Bakioglu, 1996). In this study, NPs refer to newly promoted principals who have served not more than three years as school principals.

1.6.3 Deprived Contexts

According to Maringe and Moletsane (2015), a deprived context or a context with multiple deprivations is a geographical space with a prevalence of various adverse socioeconomic factors. Similarly, Maringe et al. (2015) state that, in a deprived context, a range of poverty indicators collude to diminish livelihood and the quality of life. According to Noble et al. (2009), these adverse socioeconomic factors can be categorised under the five indices: Education deprivation, Income and Employment deprivation, Material deprivation, Health deprivation, and Living Environment deprivation. These are the indices adopted in this study as identifiers of various deprivations. In deprived contexts, these single deprivations are experienced simultaneously, manifesting in several ways to diminish and negatively impact the quality of life and livelihoods (Lumby, 2015; Maringe & Moletsane, 2015; Maringe et al., 2015; Noble et al., 2009). In this study, deprived context or a context with multiple deprivations refers to an environment with a combined incidence of single deprivations, colluding with each other, thus lowering the quality of life.

1.6.4 Identity

Identity is multi-faceted (Maalouf, 2011). This is because it embodies one's concept of self and how one defines themselves in relation to others. According to Brewer and Gardner (1996), individuals have multiple identities, which include but are not limited to the "personal self (those aspects of the self-concept that differentiate the self from all others) but also the relational or social self (those aspects of the self-concept that reflect assimilation to others or to significant social groups)" (p. 83). This study uses identity domains as a descriptor in line with the diversity of an individual's identities. The domains adopted in this study are the personal or individual level, relational, and collective (Brewer & Gardner, 1996; Lord & Hall, 1995; Miscenko et al., 2017) and will be elaborated on in the following chapter.

1.7 The Coordinates of the Dissertation

This dissertation has eight chapters. The synopsis of each chapter is presented below:

Chapter One is titled “*The Sea Road for the Maiden Voyage.*” The sea road is a route or map. This chapter presents the overview of the dissertation. Firstly, I offer the background of the study to bring out the principalship and the complexities of this role. I also highlight the global and local requirements for the position and different paths for articulation. I then look at the deprived context and illuminate some inherent challenges that make leading difficult for school leaders. The discussion then addresses the labour market situation of principals in the local sector, highlighting the current times distinguished by the rising age profile of principals with the implication of an influx in retirements in contemporary times. Lastly, this section briefly engages with the experiences of novice principals.

The second part of this chapter articulates the statement of the problem. Here I illustrate the juncture of the issues at play and how they present a unique experience for those in this position. This is followed by research puzzles, which set the parameters for the study and guide the inquiry. A three-fold rationale is presented, focussing on my inquiry's personal, professional, and theoretical motivations. I use these three levels to show what brought me to this study, why it is research worthy, and the potential contributions this work has for professional practice and the scholarly community. The key concepts used in this study are then clarified. The last part provides a summary of the current chapter and the sea road of the dissertation through a brief synopsis of each chapter.

Chapter Two reviews the literature. It is titled “*Learning from other Explorers.*” The literature review brings to the fore scholarship through which we learn from other scholars who have explored or engaged in studies on the issues of the current study.

Chapter Three outlines the theoretical framework undergirding this study. It is titled “*The Compass to Guide my Journey.*” Sense-making, Adaptive leadership, and Context-Responsive leadership are the theories forming the framework of this study. I explain the theories independently and consolidate the discussion by bringing all of them together to illustrate the appropriateness of the framework.

Chapter Four, titled “*Ways of Knowing the Novice Principals’ Voyages: Research Processes and Procedures,*” sets out the research design and methodology. This chapter details the ways of knowing and the tools and instruments used to generate the data needed to respond to the

research puzzles. These are explained, and the appropriateness of each choice is justified by reference to the characteristics of each tool and instrument.

Chapter Five presents the restoried narratives of novice principals. It is titled “*The Captains Journey to and on the Bridge.*” The control room and centre of command is the bridge. It is from here that the captain leads the ship. In this study, the captains are the novice principals, and the ship’s bridge is the principal role. In this chapter, through the novice principal’s stories generated through life history interviews, I will present their storied lives, highlighting significant plots before and during their tenure. I use the collage pictures in this chapter as part of the stories. The collages were used as a trigger to elicit memory for the life history interviews. The participants then used their collages in the various sessions we engaged in to share their stories. In this chapter, I also provide the novice principals’ emergent identities illustrating the plots from which this identity is cultivated. These answer the first research puzzle.

Chapter Six is titled “*Captaining the Bridge.*” Unlike the physical bridge of a ship, principals do not necessarily enact their role in the confines of a particular space. The metaphor has been used to explain how principals lead their schools, responding to research puzzle two.

Chapter Seven presents the findings for research puzzle three. It is titled “*Why do they command the bridge this way?*” The chapter provides the driving forces and factors that influence and shape their leadership practices. As such, it is inextricably linked to Chapter six.

Chapter Eight is titled “*Learning from the Novice Principals’ Tales: Identities and Leadership and its Intersection with the Context.*” It is how I end the journey and dock this vessel at the harbour, having taken the sea road of this study. Firstly, I provide an overview of the thesis. Secondly, I discuss the findings, presenting lessons on who principals are (identities), how they lead, and why they lead in the ways they do. Following this, I provide theoretical reflections. It should be noted that the findings in Chapters five to seven do not fully capture the application of the theoretical framework. This chapter is where the findings will be discussed, and where the adopted theoretical positioning, which will be discussed in Chapter three, is applied to make meaning of the principals’ identity, their leadership, and the connection or disconnection between leadership and the context. Unlike the dominant practice where theory and literature are used concurrently to make meaning of the findings, in this study, I share the theoretical reflections separately to show clearly what the findings mean in relation to theory – how they push the theoretical boundaries or how do they confirm the existing theories that are adopted

in this study. Fourthly, the chapter explores the methodological and personal reflections, followed by the contributions and recommendations of the study. My journey concludes here, and I dock the vessel with final remarks.

CHAPTER TWO

LEARNING FROM OTHER EXPLORERS

2.1 Introduction

The previous chapter presented the sea road, the map, and this thesis's route. It set the course for sailing, mapping out coordinates that this dissertation will pass through. This chapter provides a review of the literature. In this section titled "learning from other explorers," I lean on other scholars to provide insights on what is known and unknown, what has been accomplished/learned and what still needs to be accomplished/learned, the strengths and weaknesses of existing studies, and highlight the prominent debates (Boote & Beile, 2005).

This review begins with a brief historical account to glean the manifestation of deprivation. The discussion turns to delineate multiple deprivations. The five domains are discussed, illustrating how each deprivation impacts schooling in KZN. The following section elucidates multiple deprivations, showing their combined effects on education. The experiences of principals leading in this context follow. I turn then to the significance of identity in leadership development discourse, followed by leader identity development factors. Role transitioning complexities and experiences of novice principals relating to personal and professional contexts are then discussed. Lastly, I provide the conclusion of the chapter.

2.2 Looking to the Past to Understand the Present

The use of multiple deprivations or deprived contexts as a research framing tool or conceptual underpinning is still in its infancy (Chikoko, 2018; Maringe & Moletsane, 2015). Concerning such contexts, scholars⁸ have used terms such as challenging circumstances⁹, schools at risk (Christie, 1998), disadvantaged schools¹⁰, rural schools (Ebersöhn & Ferreira, 2012), resilient schools¹¹, and high-poverty schools¹². In some ways, these terms have some features of deprived contexts. However, I argue that they cannot create a portrait that fully explicates contexts with multiple deprivations, given the historical legacy of South Africa.

⁸ (Day, 2005; Chapman & Harris, 2004; Harris & Chapman, 2002; Potter et al., 2002)

⁹ (Day, 2005; Chapman & Harris, 2004; Harris & Chapman, 2002; Potter et al., 2002)

¹⁰ (Bush et al., 2010; Muijs et al., 2004; Christie & Potterton, 1997)

¹¹ (Jasson et al., 2010; Naicker et al., 2016)

¹² (Ebersöhn, 2014; Kamper, 2008; Lupton, 2004; Mickelson, 2018; Wool et al., 2015; Ylimaki et al., 2007)

The portrait of multiple deprivations is akin to the historical legacy of South Africa. The present architecture is the product of the colonial and apartheid eras (Chikoko, 2018; Maharaj, 2020), specifically, the history of systemic land dispossession, spatial and social segregation, political, economic, and social mechanisms for the distribution of power, privilege, opportunities, and resources along racial lines (Maharaj, 2020). Through the various acts and legislation, non-White communities were quarantined and suppressed into compounds, locations, and rural areas, pushing them to the margins with limited influence and control over their fate and livelihoods, to be annihilated, controlled, and exploited to serve White interests (Bonner & Lodge, 1989; Maharaj, 2020). The traces of this history remain. Most black people are still at the bottom of the socioeconomic ladder, residing in these apartheid geographies where living conditions have been slow to change (Chikoko, 2018; Maharaj, 2020).).

This legacy continues to influence the present, and South Africa is regarded as the most unequal country in the world (Chancel et al., 2022). Consequently, there is a distinct polarity between the haves and the have-nots. This polarity is pronounced in all sectors, including schooling institutions. Hence the assertion of the “two-nation metaphor” (Maringe et al., 2015, p. 364) or the sector having “a mixture of first and third-world institutions” (Chikoko et al., 2015, p. 452). The previously advantaged have access to functional world-class learning institutions with adequate human and financial resources and subsequently enjoy a more holistic teaching and learning experience, evidenced by better learning outcomes (Fleisch, 2008; Maringe et al., 2015). The previously disadvantaged do not have all these resources, and these schools bear little resemblance to their counterparts in all aspects (Fleisch, 2008; Maringe et al., 2015). The past is still in the present and forms the basis of understanding the current conditions of inequality and the status quo in deprived contexts.

2.3 Delineating Multiple Deprivations

Not surprisingly, life continues to be navigated in strikingly unequal spaces of possibility. In line with the foregoing use of the concepts and the need to delineate multiple deprivations for this study, I lean on other explorers. Chikoko (2018) and Townsend (1979) argue that multiple deprivations describe a condition where a community lacks access to resources needed to eradicate poverty, thus failing to meet their needs. These scholars caution that it must not be used interchangeably with poverty. The two are distinct (Nolan & Whelan, 2006; Townsend, 1979), and clarity is provided in this distinction.

Drawing from Townsend's (1979) work, poverty is defined as a situation where people lack resources. Similarly, Noble et al. (2006) suggest that poverty is best described as the lack of financial resources to meet one's needs. The impact of this lack constrains people from participating in and accessing activities regarded as essential and necessary within a particular society (Townsend, 1979). This then leads to deprivation. Townsend (1979) reiterates this by stating that poverty is a state where people lack the resources to escape deprivation.

With this distinction made, when we speak of multiple deprivations, we talk about the sum or combination of various forms of deprivations (Noble et al., 2009). According to Maringe and Moletsane (2015), a context with multiple deprivations describes a geographical space characterised by a range of negating socioeconomic factors. These scholars assert that the various negating socioeconomic factors work in confluence with each other and conspire with each other, producing an adverse environment not conducive to living, achieving human capability, and fulfilling basic needs. Amongst others, these needs include the lack of health, dignity, and limited opportunities to develop oneself, thereby altering one's circumstances (Lumby, 2015). In deprived contexts, the various forms through which this lack becomes manifest pose unique challenges that negatively impact people's quality of life (Maringe & Moletsane, 2015; Maringe et al., 2015). For education, in particular, such conditions make facilitating effective teaching and learning a difficult endeavour (Maringe & Moletsane, 2015).

It is unclear whether these single deprivations are additive or merely interact, making the sum greater or equal to the impact of single deprivations (Noble et al., 2009). An interrogation of this premise lies beyond the scope of this study. Empirically, much is still unknown about the cumulative effects of multiple deprivations (Noble et al., 2009). Scholarship on its conceptualisation is scarce, and with the infrequent use of it as a conceptual framing in education, its combined effects on schooling and school leadership are under-explored (Chikoko, 2018; Maringe & Moletsane, 2015).

2.3.1 Domains of Multiple Deprivation

We know that contexts with multiple deprivations are poverty-driven and diminish the quality of life for those who live in them. As such, the indicators used to describe it are directly related to the multiple variations that act as descriptors of poverty (Chikoko, 2018; Maringe & Moletsane, 2015; Noble et al., 2009). These descriptors are called indices or domains (Chikoko, 2018; Maringe & Moletsane, 2015; Noble et al., 2009). Deprived communities are exposed to and face the combined impact of these domains concurrently (Maringe & Moletsane, 2015).

This study draws from a range of widely used and contextually acknowledged domains. They are Education deprivation, Income and Employment deprivation, Material deprivation, Health deprivation, and Living environment deprivation (Chikoko, 2018; Maringe & Moletsane, 2015; Noble et al., 2009). This discussion covers three aspects of each deprivation. First, an explanation of each domain, followed by a brief statistical overview highlighting how it manifests in Kwa-Zulu Natal, the context in which this study was conducted. Lastly, the discussion will demonstrate how single deprivations impact schooling.

2.3.1.1 Education Deprivation

This domain describes the number of people with relatively low levels of education, those who are illiterate or with no formal education between the ages of 18 and 65 (Maringe & Moletsane, 2015; Noble et al., 2014). The prevalence of this deprivation is rife in KwaZulu-Natal (KZN). In a recent report produced by Statistics South Africa (herein Stats SA), in KZN, approximately 25% of the population is illiterate and cannot read and write in at least one language (STATS SA, 2019).

Education deprivation adversely affects children and their development. The findings of a study by Farooq et al. (2012) conducted in urban Pakistan with a sample of 300 male and female students, using the grade 9 annual results, suggest that the parents' socioeconomic status (SES) and the education level of parents have a significant effect on the students' overall performance. Learners with parents of lower SES and a low education level performed more poorly than those with high and average SES and a higher level of education (Farooq et al., 2012). Similar findings emerged in Western Europe, where 43 870 children aged an average of ten years were sampled (Hemmerechts et al., 2017). It was found that parents' education level influenced their involvement in their children's educational activities (Hemmerechts et al., 2017). Subsequently, parents with lower levels of education engaged much later in supporting their children's literacy activities. In turn, their children had lower literacy levels during primary schooling than their counterparts (Hemmerechts et al., 2017).

Additionally, Schneider (2018) posits that active parental involvement significantly contributes to a child's success in school. Looking at the local context, Taylor and Yu (2009) found that a low level of parental involvement is a constraining factor in extending support at home with activities such as homework (Taylor & Yu, 2009). Parents with low levels of education were also found to have a comparatively lower social capital, which is seen as a necessary ingredient to succeed in school (Coleman, 1988). This may result in limited access to information

regarding their children's health and social and emotional well-being, significantly contributing to impaired educational achievement (Taylor & Yu, 2009).

Though two of these studies emanate from a different context, they show the negative impact of education deprivation on children. To this end, Klasen (1997) asserts that an intergenerational cycle of education deprivation, especially among the black population, is perpetuated as they still make up the vast percentage of those with this deprivation. Additionally, academic performance is instrumental in one's income potential and access to employment opportunities (Taylor & Yu, 2009). Given the impact of parental education on schooling, the prospects of those with parents who have low levels of education are compromised. There is no doubt that principals appointed to lead in contexts affected by this domain of deprivation have to find ways to address it, and it is within the scope of this study to understand what it means to lead in schools in such a context. Also, where the education level is low, citizens are likely to rely on low-paying jobs or government grants since their level of education does not allow them to attain black-tie professions (Chikoko, 2018; Maringe & Moletsane, 2015). This, in turn, leads to the next domain, which is income and employment deprivation

2.3.1.2 Income and Employment Deprivation

The fundamental marker of this deprivation is the scarcity of sufficient financial capacity due to low parental income (Maringe & Moletsane, 2015). In most cases, low parental income is due to unemployment (Noble & Wright, 2012; Nobel et al., 2014). KZN is a rural province (Noble & Wright, 2012; Nobel et al., 2014). In such areas, economic opportunities are scarce, with the vast population dependent on social grants and menial labour for income (Chikoko, 2018; Maringe & Moletsane, 2015). The 2018 General Household Survey (GHS) revealed that KZN is ranked 4th in terms of the number of households that received at least one social grant, and for 24.6% of the homes, this is the primary source of income (GHS, 2018).

These statistics indicate a substantial dependency on this limited income and further suggest a lack of other means of income generation. It is not surprising, given that the unemployment rate in South Africa is significantly high and has been on this upward trajectory with minor fluctuations (STATS SA, 2022). Although this does not provide the provincial overview, KZN is amongst the two provinces where unemployment is rife (Nkanjeni, 2022).

In instances where other means of income are available, this is constrained by the large numbers of individuals within each household. According to the GHS (2018), this is more pronounced

in KZN, where single households house six or more individuals (GHS, 2018). Various factors contribute to this situation. The province has the highest number of orphaned children, at 16.1%, with an additional 24.4% of children not residing with their parents, the second highest in the country (GHS, 2018). As a result, households are likely to be triple-generation households with three generations within that household (GHS, 2018). Lastly, KZN has a significant incidence of female-headed households (GHS, 2018). One of the implications of the large families and the substantial incidence in female-headed homes is that province has the third highest headcount of poverty, which sits at 60.7% of the adult population, which is more than half of the population (STATS SA, 2019).

The issues highlighted above demonstrate that financial resources are strained. Zooming into the high prevalence of child-headed homes, studies conducted by Faulkner (2015) and Chikoko et al. (2015) also revealed that a significant number of learners were from child-headed homes. In some cases, grandparents or other relatives shouldered the responsibility for the care of learners (Faulkner, 2015). Faulkner (2015) presents a troubling implication relating to learners. In her study in deprived schools in South Africa, it was found that, due to lack of resources and their vulnerability, some school-going girls are in precarious situations where they have to choose starvation or resort to sexual favours and selling themselves for food (Faulkner, 2015). This may lead to teenage pregnancy or sexually transmitted infections, making the lives of those affected more challenging and negatively affecting their educational prospects. This situation exacerbates the financial strain since learners of school-going age cannot contribute financially to these households and have to further depend on grants to raise their children. Consequently, in the presence of unemployment, poverty exists, and where poverty exists, there is also a significant lack in providing basic needs (Klasen, 1997). Linked to the two deprivations already mentioned is material deprivation, discussed below.

2.3.1.3 Material Deprivation

Material deprivation is associated with infrastructure and essential services that are inadequate relative to what is deemed normal (Chikoko, 2018; Maringe & Moletsane, 2015; Noble et al., 2014). This includes people with no accommodation, those housed in poor quality housing such as shacks, and lacking essential services like water, electricity, and decent sanitation (Klasen, 1997; Maringe & Moletsane, 2015). As mentioned, where poverty exists, the ability to provide for basic needs is strained (Klasen, 1997). Relating to the school context, the 2018 National Education Infrastructure Management System (NEIMS) reported that many schools in rural and township areas still lack basic infrastructure (DBE, 2018). The schools in question

are dilapidated, and teaching and learning resources are scarce (Chikoko et al., 2015; Naicker, 2018).

In the most deprived provinces (Eastern Cape, KwaZulu Natal, and Limpopo), many schools still lack basic sanitation and have pit toilets (Bhengu & Myende, 2016; DBE, 2018; Faulkner, 2015). In 2019 the estimated number of schools with pit toilets stood at approximately 3000 (SAHRC, 2021). The issue of pit toilets is dangerous as it has resulted in fatalities from children drowning in these toilets (SAHRC, 2021). This incident was highly publicised in 2018 when a primary school learner drowned and died while using a pit toilet (Somdyala, 2019). Unfortunately, this incident has not been isolated (SAHRC, 2021). In a case where the school had insufficient toilet facilities, this caused hygiene problems as the school had difficulties maintaining functionality and cleanliness (Faulkner, 2015). More so, this negatively impacted girls because they opted to stay away from school when they were menstruating (Faulkner, 2015). The results of both incidents mentioned regarding sanitation show that girls' learning opportunities are significantly diminished (Devnarain & Matthias, 2011). To this end, Mbatha (2011) reveals a strong correlation between poor access to sanitation and girls' school attendance. In terms of other facilities, deprived schools have poor or no fencing, sporting facilities, laboratories, libraries, and communication facilities (DBE, 2018).

Additionally, these schools are in communities with a high prevalence of RDP houses and a substantial number of mushrooming informal settlements, resulting in densely populated areas (Chikoko et al., 2015; Faulkner, 2015). The density of these communities creates ecosystems where schools are near taxi ranks, liquor stores, or taverns (Faulkner, 2015). In the study by Faulkner (2015), the proximity to these areas influenced a high number of incidents relating to rape, some of which resulted in teenage pregnancy (Faulkner, 2015). In the case of teenage pregnancy, this leveraged challenges as school management worked against the tide to ensure that pregnant learners' educational and social rights were not undermined (Faulkner, 2015).

The architecture of these areas is also such that there is a high prevalence of crime. This negatively impacts the school due to vandalism and criminal elements inside and outside the school (Chikoko et al., 2015; Naicker, 2018; Ngcobo & Tikly, 2010). These schools are also easy targets for criminals as they have no fencing and seldom have security personnel or alarm systems (DBE, 2018).

Deprived schools are in areas with service delivery issues. These include poor road infrastructure, which results in inaccessibility during heavy rains (Faulkner, 2015). Due to

service delivery issues, there is a growing tendency for these communities to engage in protests to express their dissatisfaction and demand better services (Khambule et al., 2019). During these protests or heavy rains, schools have to close down and suffer the loss of instructional time. All these issues highlighted, though some are externally located, create adverse conditions that significantly impact schools and those who lead them.

2.3.1.4 Health Deprivation

Health deprivation refers to the number of people afflicted by diseases in a particular context and where there is a relatively high number of premature deaths in the population (Chikoko, 2018; Maringe & Moletsane, 2015). HIV/AIDS is one of the most prevalent diseases affecting South Africa, resulting in the deaths of many parents and thus in child-headed homes (Chikoko, 2018), and KZN is ranked as the province with the highest number of infections (Naidoo & Premdutt, 2019; Thurlow et al., 2009).

HIV/AIDS impedes children's schooling through illness, orphanhood, and parental illness (Zinyemba et al., 2019). Additionally, there is a high prevalence of absenteeism, decreased learner enrolments, and high dropout rates among children affected by HIV/AIDS (Chisholm, 2005; Zinyemba et al., 2019). Family income is sometimes diverted from education to support sick family members (Chisholm, 2005). Children who have observed their parents physically deteriorate from the disease or who experience their parents' death may also experience post-traumatic stress, depression, and stigma (Chisholm, 2005; Zinyemba et al., 2019). These circumstances may dampen learner motivation (Coombe, 2000), adversely impacting their studies.

This section has covered the deprivation domains and illustrated what it entails. It has also touched on the defining features of the domains and how they manifest in KZN. The impact of single deprivation on schooling and learners is undeniable. The footprint and the evident manifestation of the single deprivations in the KZN province are also undeniable. Banerjee (2016) notes that due to the numerous drawbacks, children become highly vulnerable and face various obstacles that compromise their learning trajectories. The above discussion supports this notion, purporting that these domains collude to create toxic school environments (Lumby, 2015). I argue that the context of multiple deprivations is also termed a prejudiced context. Prejudiced contexts are environments with "predictable, systematic, social and economic inequalities in experience and outcomes based on people's social group memberships" (Murphey et al., 2018, p.66). As demonstrated by the domains and their impact, predictable

socioeconomic inequalities exist in deprived contexts that depress the way of life. The following section elaborates on multiple deprivations and schooling.

2.4 Multiple Deprivations and Schooling

The previous section discussed the architecture of these apartheid geographies, illustrating how the single deprivations manifest in KZN and impact schooling and learners. Already stated elsewhere, limited research has been conducted to explain the combined effects of multiple deprivations on learners, learning, and schooling (Maringe & Moletsane, 2015). While the combined effects are still unclear, explorers have taken time to unpack the prevalent conditions in deprived contexts. The impact this has on schooling is known and will be elaborated on below.

According to Chikoko (2018), deprived schools are conventionally located in township and rural areas, commonly classified between quintiles 1 to 3. The quintile classification system is based on the location of schools and the prevalent socioeconomic factors in these areas. These factors are the average income, unemployment rates, literacy level (Ogbonnaya & Awuah, 2019), and the domain indices explained above. With the need for redress, those most economically and historically disadvantaged receive the highest state subsidy (Ogbonnaya & Awuah, 2019). They do not pay school fees (Ogbonnaya & Awuah, 2019) and benefit from the National School Nutrition Programme (NSNP), lessening the financial burden of obtaining access to education.

While these schools do receive some specialised forms of support in terms of resource allocation, for the most part, they are unable to serve the purpose for which they are intended. Many schools in deprived contexts are dysfunctional and struggle to provide a satisfactory fit-for-purpose educational experience for the learners (Chikoko et al., 2015; Maringe & Moletsane, 2015). As a result, there is a clear contrast in the realities faced by schools in deprived contexts as opposed to those in less deprived contexts (Bhengu & Myende, 2016).

One of the factors influencing dysfunctionality is the disintegration of the core function of schools, as indicated by a weak or non-existent culture of teaching and learning (Chikoko et al., 2015; Naicker, 2018). Although it is currently unknown what precedes this disintegration, it is known that “schools do not turn bad or underperform overnight” (Monyooe, 2017, p. 472) but gradually degenerate over time, depressing school-wide learner achievement and performance (Mickelson, 2018; Monyooe, 2017; Naicker, 2018).

In his narrative work, on his account of leading a deprived school in KZN, Naicker (2018) narrates his personal experience. Upon appointment, he observed the school had adopted and normalised a culture of abnormality. He explains this in terms of learner performance, with the matric results falling to a 3% pass rate. Naicker (2018) states that the core function of teaching and learning was non-existent. The original aesthetic appearance of the school bore no resemblance to what it had become. The grass was overgrown, the school buildings were dilapidated, and there was an unpleasing stench from overflowing toilets (Naicker, 2018). The school had become a warzone and a “hub of violence, indiscipline, corruption, and confrontation” (Naicker, 2018, p. 38). In their study, Chikoko et al. (2015) also reported on criminal elements present inside and outside of schools. These findings illustrate what is meant by the confluence of factors working together to depress learning where external issues of crime end up infiltrating school walls, making the schools themselves hubs of violence.

Similar results have emerged from other scholars¹³. Negative school cultures characterise schools in contexts with multiple deprivations. These are observed through a high incidence of learner and teacher absenteeism (Bayeni, 2018; Mkhize & Bhengu, 2018; Naicker, 2018), high learner drop-outs (Chikoko, 2018), and poor staff morale and relations (Blose & Naicker, 2018; Naicker, 2018). Another factor influencing the negative culture is a high level of unionization. In highly unionized schools, internal decision-making processes are weak and undermined, causing fragmentations, factionalism, and discord, sometimes leading to revolt (Faulkner, 2015; Chikoko et al., 2015; Naicker, 2018). Resources are scarce, and there is overcrowding in some schools due to high teacher-learner ratios (Chikoko et al., 2015). There is poor parental involvement and poor leadership.

Against these conditions, some deprived schools achieve “success against the odds” (Christie & Potterton, 1999, p. 93). These scholars refer to these schools as resilient schools (Christie & Potterton, 1999). They argue that resilient schools are those that demonstrate success in the face of challenging circumstances. While neighbouring schools may show signs of crisis and what is commonly known as “the breakdown of the culture of teaching and learning,” resilient schools not only manage to survive but also perform well (Christie & Potterton, 1999). They

¹³ (Bayeni, 2018; Chikoko et al., 2015; Faulkner, 2015; Maringe et al., 2015; Naicker, 2018; Ngcobo & Tikly, 2010)

are able to transcend the adversity they face, ultimately thriving in their educational endeavors¹⁴.

These silos of excellence are an exception rather than the norm. Mostly, the schools in these contexts are rocked harshly by the rogue waves, experience depressed school effectiveness, and leading such schools becomes more challenging (Otunga et al., 2008). Incidentally, most principals lack the necessary knowledge, skills, and attitudes to navigate them (Otunga et al., 2008). According to Fusarelli and Militello (2012), turning the tide and keeping afloat in the face of these circumstances requires “strategic investment in school leadership capacity (p.46).” Regardless, locally, principals are deployed using a one size fits all approach, where no particular concern is taken as to whether they have the necessary skills, attitudes, and values to navigate the demands and contextual challenges (Maringe et al., 2015). Most leaders are pressured with unrealistic expectations of what can be achieved (Lumby, 2015).

2.5 Leadership for Schools in Deprived Contexts

Though still in its infancy, common trends emerge from the leadership practices of those who lead deprived schools. What must be noted is that seasoned principals enact the practices discussed below. That being said, they provide insights into leadership that is contextually embedded in schools located in deprived contexts. The practices are discussed through three themes. They are the school culture, working with and for others, and managing the instructional programme.

2.5.1 The School Culture

The school climate dictates the school culture. According to Schein (1992), school culture refers to unwritten rules, behaviours, and norms that people learn to fit into an organisation. It is established and kept together by “basic assumptions invented, discovered, or developed by a group of people” (Schein, 1985, p. 9) and guides how things are done in the school. The school culture becomes ingrained, normalised, and dictates the way of life and people’s behaviours in the organisation. School culture is significant for educational institutions. It “fosters school effectiveness and productivity, improves collegiality, communication, and problem-solving, promotes innovation and improvement, builds commitment, and rejuvenates

¹⁴ (Chikoko et al., 2015; Christie & Potterson, 1999; Grant et al., 2018; Kamper, 2008; Spaull, 2013)

motivation” (Deal & Peterson, 2016, pp. 14-15). More so, these scholars state that it amplifies school stakeholders' energy, vitality, and trust and focuses attention on what is essential and valued. As mentioned in the discussion of multiple deprivations, schools in contexts this context are characterised by negative school culture conducive to teaching and learning. Reshaping such a culture is essential because culture affects numerous aspects of a school (Deal & Peterson, 2016). Reshaping the culture is thus imperative.

Drawing from previous studies, principals leading schools in deprived contexts have used various approaches to reshape the cultures of their schools. In Naicker’s (2018) work, the norm was that school activities would be delayed at the beginning of the year. Instead of teaching and learning, learners would clean classrooms while teachers lounged around in the staffroom. There would be an alarming number of new enrolments as this was not done in the previous year. All these factors delayed timetabling and workload allocation resulting in the loss of instructional time. Enrolments and planning for the next year were done in advance to change this culture (Naicker, 2018). A management meeting was held a week before school opened to ensure readiness. Naicker (2018) states a positive reaction to the “new” school ethos was observed through improvements in teacher and learner morale and cooperation with the new way of doing things.

Other principals reshaped the school culture by creating and sustaining a mission and vision that would serve as a compass to drive school improvements. According to Hallinger and Heck (2002), defining the school mission is a way of creating a visible, shared understanding whereby a purpose and vision are designed to guide the achievement of school goals. Goals help people make sense of their work (Leithwood et al., 2004). Importantly, ownership and support of these goals are cultivated if the process is collaborative, involving multiple stakeholder participation and inputs (Msila, 2013; Whitehead et al., 2013). In a recent study by Dzimiri (2018), a principal appointed to a poor-performing school located in a deprived context collaborated with various stakeholders to create a mission and vision articulated through the school motto “ZPS leads, and the rest follow.” From this, the principal observed that the school became focused on living out the motto such that they experienced an increase in the pass rate of Grade 7 learners from a low 15% to 95% in five years.

As evidenced by the scholarship presented here, school culture significantly influences the direction of schools. Thus, it is crucial for novice principals to focus on this element as it yields significant gains necessary to turn the tides or improve the schools they lead. Though not

explicit in this discussion, school culture is a collective phenomenon and thus requires a school-wide shift. As such, needs others to come on board for any significant changes to be achieved. The section below elaborates on how principals adopt this collective mindset by working with and for others.

2.5.2 Working with and for Others

The discussion above shows that principals do not act independently to turn the tide in their schools. Through relationships that they build, they can collaboratively work with others and utilise the capital they have to enhance school performance. This approach moves away from the unjustifiable practice of viewing those in such contexts from a deficit approach (Maringe & Moletsane, 2015). Rightfully so, Maringe and Moletsane (2015) reject this approach and call for acknowledgment that those housed in these contexts have agency and resilience and can successfully mitigate the circumstances faced in deprived schools (Maringe & Moletsane, 2015). To this, Myende and Hlalele (2018) add that we ought to use the lens of a strengths-based approach where we acknowledge that, despite their circumstances, these communities house various community capitals and community assets that can serve as significant drivers of educational development initiatives. Consequently, if we apply this lens, their involvement and input evolve from being symbolic and can meaningfully contribute to school improvement (Myende & Hlalele, 2018). Building relationships and working with others is one of the ways of promoting collegiality for improved school culture.

In their study focusing on novice principals leading in rural schools in a midwestern U.S. state, the findings from Wieczorek and Manard (2018) reveal that these principals focused on establishing positive relationships and building rapport amongst all stakeholders in the school community. The principals were driven by the idea that reform would need all stakeholders' buy-in and collective capital (Wieczorek & Manard, 2018). These principals also focused on creating an atmosphere of trust and safety, encouraged by opening a safe space for communication, being accessible, and having open-door policies applicable to stakeholders. They maintained visibility and modelled behaviours of open-mindedness, inclusivity, respect, and listening to influence others to replicate similar behaviours.

The evidence also suggests that principals place a high value on collaboration, where school leaders thrive on creating and sustaining school-community partnerships using an asset-based

approach¹⁵. Additionally, principals partnered with SGBs and parents, building socially cohesive relations with transparency and trust (Mfeka et al., 2018; Naicker, 2018). Other collaborative initiatives include inter-school connections and incorporating learners into the school structure¹⁶. These scholars assert that power-sharing and partnerships founded on mutual trust and responsibility are valuable in bringing about change within the school. Reshaping the culture is a change process that requires the mobilisation and participation of all members (Miles, 2005). Working with others is thus essential.

While leaders in deprived school contexts endeavour to work with others, they also work for others by exercising servant leadership (Chikoko et al., 2015; Naicker, 2018). The servant leaders' behaviours and actions are characterised by listening; empathy; awareness; persuasion; conceptualisation; foresight; stewardship; commitment to the growth of people; placing value on people, and community-building (Spears, 2010). Behaviours and practices further demonstrating servant leadership include but are not limited to leading by example, working beyond the call of duty, and insisting on protecting children's rights within the school and beyond¹⁷.

Another way in which servitude is extended is through a leadership of care. In Myende et al. (2021), principals leading deprived schools in Nigeria showed care by ensuring and securing the well-being of learners and tending to their needs. They provided uniforms and food beyond that catered for by the school nutrition feeding scheme (Myende et al., 2021). The principals in this study went as far as providing financial resources for learners to secure their well-being.

Lumby (2015) asserts that principals in deprived face the task of safeguarding the present and future rights of learners through education, even in situations where the rights of learners are openly disregarded. Grant et al. (2010) further support this by stating that despite the difficult conditions, certain schools in deprived contexts create secure environments where students can experience a sense of belonging and receive a quality education.

2.5.3 Managing the Instructional Programme

The core function of schools is to provide quality teaching and learning. As already stated, most deprived schools are dysfunctional, requiring focused, structured interventions for improvement. According to Wahlstrom et al. (2010), managing the instructional programme

¹⁵(Bhengu & Myende, 2016; Chikoko et al., 2015; Dzimiri, 2018; Myende, 2018; Naicker, 2018)

¹⁶ (Bhengu & Myende, 2016; Chikoko et al., 2015; Dzimiri, 2018; Myende, 2018; Naicker, 2018)

¹⁷ (Bayeni, 2018; Dzimiri, 2018; Khuzwayo, 2018; Mkhize & Bhengu, 2018; Naicker, 2018)

includes structured interventions that promote support and supervision, monitor learning, and ensure that teachers focus on teaching and learning to improve classroom instruction.

Hoosier's (2019) study on the leadership practices of primary school principals in deprived schools in South Africa found that some principals focused on academic support in collaboration with other school stakeholders. Activities included increasing instructional time by starting classes early to have extra language lessons, having remedial classes for struggling learners, and more specialised and focused tutoring for learners struggling with the grasp of curricular content (Hoosier, 2019).

In their multi-case study of eighteen resilient schools in KZN, Grant et al. (2010) found that principals in resilient schools also prioritised the core responsibility of teaching and learning, striving to excel in fundamental aspects. Notably, there was a strong emphasis on optimizing instructional time, with teachers actively engaged in teaching and learners equally invested in learning. The principals in this study underscored the significance of promoting good attendance and punctuality among teachers and students. Furthermore, during challenging periods, the principals relied on the robust functional systems they had established within the schools and adhered to school regulations and rules to maintain stability and preserve the school's integrity.

In another small-scale study by Chikoko et al. (2015), principals leading deprived schools distributed the leadership for curriculum monitoring to Departmental Heads (DHs). The DHs worked closely with teachers and conducted class visits (Chikoko et al., 2015). Similar findings emerge from Naicker (2018), where the principal collaborated closely with the School Management Team (SMT) to devise curriculum management toolkits. They further introduced consultations between teachers and DHs to extend support for classroom instruction (Naicker, 2018). In Bhengu and Mkhize (2018), principals, in collaboration with SMTs, developed a curriculum tracker to ensure full curriculum coverage. These principals assembled a diverse team, including the subject heads and the grade heads, under the leadership of the DH to work collaboratively to provide support and monitor curriculum coverage (Bhengu & Mkhize, 2018). The curriculum monitoring was extended to ensure that instructional time was maximised and time lost due to circumstances beyond their control was recovered through Saturday classes and extending the school day through morning and evening catch-up sessions (Bhengu & Mkhize, 2018). Mncube and Harper (2009) support such collaborations emphasizing that principals must work collaboratively with their SMT and teachers.

The discussion above illustrates that in deprived schools, some principals adopt a variety of approaches, acknowledging that effective improvement necessitates the enactment of a wide range of practices (Leithwood & Sun, 2012). These principals are also mindful that their leadership is influenced by the specific context in which they operate, imposing certain constraints on their actions (Brennan & MacRuar, 2019). Grant et al. (2010) emphasize that while some of these practices may seem ordinary and assumed to be universal across all schools, they are not necessarily the case. They argue that prioritizing teaching and learning as a central feature is not immediately apparent, widely acknowledged or a common feature in deprived schools.

2.6 The Significance of Identity in Leadership Development Discourse

A considerable body of scholarship¹⁸ exists, advancing the argument that identity is significant in leadership. Identity informs our beliefs, feelings, attitudes, and goals; shapes and guides our choices; and, as a result, influences our behaviours and actions¹⁹. Consequentially, it plays a significant role in influencing work-related behaviours (Miscenko & Day, 2016; Lord & Hall, 2005), and it is consequently a prominent factor in influencing leadership practices (Miscenko & Day, 2016). According to Lord and Hall (2005), identity is particularly significant for NPs. These scholars assert that new leaders rely heavily on their individual identities as they are still learning leadership and seeking approval and validation of their leadership status. NPs thus draw on their identities to demonstrate their uniqueness and differentiate themselves as school leaders.

According to Hallinger (2018), identity is attached to life experiences. Our experiences are a resource base through which we filter through and interpret information, problems, opportunities, and situations (Hallinger, 2018). From this viewpoint, identity is a frame and reference through which we organize knowledge (Miscenko & Day, 2016; Lord & Hall, 2005). It is also a significant source of motivational forces that propel leaders to have agency for self-development (Lord & Hall, 2005). For school principals, identity is an influencing factor in making sense of and enacting their leadership role (Scribner & Crow, 2012). This way, it serves

¹⁸ (Clapp-Smith et al., 2019; Cruz-González et al., 2019; Kwok et al., 2018; Moorosi & Grant, 2018; Miscenko et al., 2017; Scribner & Crow, 2012; Day et al., 2005)

¹⁹ (Clapp-Smith et al., 2019; Kwok et al., 2018; Moorosi & Grant, 2018; Miscenko et al., 2017; Scribner & Crow, 2012; Day et al., 2005)

as an impetus and directional driving force for actions and behaviours (Miscenko & Day, 2016).

Schools have become complex and dynamic organizations (Daniëls et al., 2019; Scribner & Crow, 2012). The work of principals demands more than technical knowledge and skills but requires adaptability, values, beliefs, and creativity to navigate the complexities and dynamics of this leadership role (Scribner & Crow, 2012). Pullen (2006) posits that identity is a construct and resource principals draw from to produce accounts to explain, respond to, and understand organisational pressures and changes. Given its significance, it is crucial to understand the factors that shape leader identities. This is even more important for novice principals because, in the early stages of their careers, leaders rely on identity work as a medium to mediate action (Clapp-Smith et al., 2019). Understanding factors that shape identity development becomes crucial, an issue that will be elaborated on in the following section.

2.6.1 Factors influencing Leader Identity Development

In this study, leaning on various scholars²⁰, I take the position that identity is multi-faceted (Brewer & Gardner, 1996; Maalouf, 2011) and construed across multiple domains. These identity domains are the personal or individual level, relational, and collective²¹. Personal level identities relate to the individual traits that differentiate one person from the other, thus creating a unique being (Brewer & Gardner, 1996; Lord & Hall, 1995). In contrast, relational identities define the self-relative to a specific role or relations with others (Lord & Hall, 1995; Miscenko & Day, 2016). These relations may be personal or less intimate, such as colleagues, acquaintances, or other networks (Brewer & Gardner, 1996). Lastly, collective identities are those construed by self-perceptions relative to one's organization and social category membership (Brewer & Gardner, 1996). Unlike relational identity, this identity domain is not foregrounded in any relationship but is derived from identification with some symbolic group (Miscenko & Day, 2016).

These domains are broad descriptors. In each domain, an individual has multiple coexisting identities. Simultaneously, individuals can draw from anyone at any given time and situation (Brewer & Gardner, 1996; Thoits & Virshup, 1997). They also overlap and are interrelated (Thoits & Virshup, 1997). They are also not stable and static. According to Day (2018), identity construction is negotiated with internal experiences and the surrounding external social,

²⁰ (Brewer & Gardner, 1996; Lord & Hall, 1995; Miscenko et al., 2017)

²¹ (Brewer & Gardner, 1996; Lord & Hall, 1995; Miscenko et al., 2017)

political, and cultural context. As such, they are constantly being shaped, modified, developed, and edited as we acquire more experiences (DeRue & Ashford, 2010; Hammond et al., 2017). Thus, leadership development occurs through multiple domains (Brungardt, 1996; Hammond et al., 2017).

2.7 Journeying Somewhere: The Making and Becoming

The journey toward principalship has no definite stage where it begins. Various scholars (Hammond et al., 2017; Moorosi & Grant, 2018; Ribbins, 2008) purport this rejecting the notion that leadership socialisation and identity development occur formally within professional and organizational contexts. According to these scholars, socialisation and the making of a principal is dynamic and continual, starting from early childhood through the various life stages. The early years are a significant time when the principal is socialised with “deep-rooted norms and values by the action and interaction of key agencies like family, school and teachers, peer groups and local community” (Ribbins, 2008, p. 64). Making a principal is thus a winding journey, with others already on it unknowingly.

The next stage in this journeying occurs when future principals enter the profession (Ribbins, 2008). During this stage, individuals may incrementally and intentionally seek experience and development for future leadership roles, or this process may happen by chance (Duke, 1987; Ribbins, 2008). When it is intentional, they establish networks and build alliances that prepare them for leadership (Ribbins, 2008). For other principals, this socialisation also occurs through formal leadership preparation (Moorosi & Grant, 2018).

Ribbins (2008) states that certain presumptions about the ascension to the principalship need to be challenged. Firstly, the notion that a principal must be an accredited and experienced teacher is not necessarily a prerequisite for principalship (Ribbins, 2008). Secondly, the assumption that those who ascend to leadership roles primarily choose to teach as their first option is debatable (Ribbins, 2008). Thirdly, the idea that those who become principals proactively seek promotion is not entirely accurate (Ribbins, 2008). As a result, individuals experience this stage in various ways, but, more often than not, during this stage, principals seldom experience any substantial proactive or systematic preparation (Ribbins, 2008). Opportunities may thus be missed or not taken because future principals may not be aware of the future.

The becoming stage commences once an individual is appointed into the principalship role (Ribbins, 2008). Other scholars refer to this as organizational socialisation (Crow, 2006). Ribbins (2008) suggests that acclimatization into the role unfolds in three stages. They are initiation, development, and autonomy. Here I will focus on the initiation phase, as this is the phase that novice principals are still going through. The initiation or induction stage (Optlatka, 2012) is about learning the ropes and doing things associated with the new role (Crow, 2006; Moorosi & Grant, 2018). It is when the NPs are assimilated and socialised into their new position and school and the broader community (Moorosi & Grant, 2018; Optlatka, 2012). This is a foundational stage of self-learning and transition where the NP must consolidate a clear and distinct leader identity significantly different from the staff (Azar, 2017; Optlatka, 2012). During this transitional period, the NP has to contend with many dilemmas, such as learning the organizational culture, attaining acceptance, developing confidence, and overcoming the insecurities attached to the unknown (Spillane & Lee, 2014; Optlatka, 2012). This state is thus crucial because it is not just about orientation but survival (Optlatka, 2012). NPs must tactfully navigate through this inescapable rite of passage needed to access their profession and consolidate their membership (Bristol et al., 2014), given the stakes and consequences this stage has on their trajectory.

Role transitioning is complex and daunting (Kilinc & Gumus, 2021). According to Daresh and Male (2000), moving from one role to another is like crossing the border. Spillane and Lee (2014) describe it as a sharp and critical point that necessitates individuals adopt new ways of being, doing, and thinking, resulting in the ultimate reality shock. In their analysis of the role transition, Lane (1984) and Normore (2004) state that it is an intricate process of learning and reflection that requires one to renounce the comfort and confidence of the previous position and to experience the uncertainty and discomfort of the new, unknown role (Brown-Ferrigno, 2003). The very nature of any real change is such that it involves loss, anxiety, and struggle (Marris, 1975 in Fullan, 2007). Though transitional challenges differ because of contextual variables²², studies²³ indicate no immunity from such feelings. Those who ascend from deputy principals or acting principals within the same schools, and even those with formal leadership preparation, experience the discomfort and anxiety of transition.

²² (Bush, 2011; Hallinger & Heck, 2011; Spillane & Lee, 2014)

²³ (Garcia-Gardun˜o et al. 2011; Ng, 2015; Ng & Nzeto, 2015; Ramsey, 2006; Spillane et al., 2015)

This section has highlighted the journey of making and becoming a principal. It has delved deeper into the complexities experienced during this transitional phase, a crucial stage that may make or break a novice leader. The following section takes a closer look at the experiences of novice principals.

2.8 At the Bridge: Captaining the Ship

While transitioning, novice principals are expected to take responsibility on the bridge, lead their schools, and captain the ship. I use Wildy and Clarke's (2008) four categories to discuss novice principals' leadership experiences. These categories relate to the self, people, place, and systems (Clarke & Wildy, 2013; Wildy & Clarke, 2008). A brief explanation of each will be provided and then used to discuss the on-job realities that NPs experience. The review below is not limited to the national or local context. This is because there is a common consensus amongst scholars²⁴ that, irrespective of location, for the most part, novice principals in both the developed and developing world face similar experiences.

2.8.1 On-job Realities: Experiences Related to Self

Experiences related to the self are linked to one's identities, values, and intentions (Clarke & Wildy, 2013). The on-job realities and experiences of novices of self are vast. According to Clarke and Wildy (2013), principalship comes with a certain level of personal resilience, often overlooked by novices. These scholars assert that, though NPs maybe be unaware of this, they draw resilience from their identities, self-perceptions, personal and professional inclinations, and intentions to deal with the emotional demands of the job (Clarke & Wildy, 2013).

According to Spillane and Lee (2014), the title comes with a burden. These scholars suggest that other colleagues become distant and more cautious of those who lead. Changes in power dynamics and status shift social relationships, as other colleagues no longer see principals as teachers (Loder & Spillane, 2005). Thus, novice principals experience professional isolation and loneliness (Daresh & Male, 2000; Liljenberg & Andersson, 2020; Spillane & Lee, 2014).

Struggles of self also play out as novices have to juggle multiple and, at times, competing roles that come with the assumption of greater responsibility, decision-making power, and

²⁴ (Bush, 2018; Garcia Garduno, 2011; Leiva et al., 2017; Meyer & Patuawa, 2022; Montecos et al., 2018; Wicczorek & Manard, 2018; Weinsten et al., 2016)

accountability²⁵. Identity dilemmas come into play as they charter into this unknown territory and work through these roles (Spillane & Lee, 2014). Various studies²⁶ indicate that novices are overstretched, frustrated, overwhelmed, and struggle to balance their time and attention. They experience the frustration of negotiating who they are and have to be. As they engage in these diverse tasks and with others, they continually reconstruct their professional and personal identities (Spillane & Lee, 2014; Oplatka, 2012). They engage in identity work, co-constructing these identities against the grain of the ascribed social identities (Mbatha et al., 2021; Watson, 2009).

The ascribed social identities come with expectations and pressures. According to Walker and Qian (2006), NPs are expected to be the complete package for internal and external stakeholders. They feel like they have to be everything to everyone (Meyer & Patuawa, 2022; Spillane & Lee, 2014) and to live up to this expectation that they have to “wear multiple hats” (Wieczorek & Manard, 2018, p.13). These expectations and pressure add to their emotional labor (Clarke & Wildy, 2008) and are internal conflicts experienced by novice principals.

2.8.2 On-job Realities: Experiences Related to People

The aspect of people is central to leadership. Leadership does not occur in a vacuum. It is relative. There must be followers or those that are led. Additionally, it is through people that principals can achieve school goals. Experiences related to people refer to the ability of principals to cultivate and maintain positive, productive human relationships (Duignan, 2006). Novice principals must negotiate for their acceptance as new principals in their schools. At their inception, they have to deal with the legacy of the previous principal (Hart, 1993; Northfield, 2013). They are constantly compared to them regardless of whether they were “a hero to be lived up to” or a “bad act to follow” (Spillane & Lee, 2014, p. 435). This places them in a precarious situation, and they must make tough choices.

One such choice is choosing whether or not to use a distributed perspective, which has both incentives and disincentives (Spillane et al., 2015). The volume, diversity of work, and potential for a collaborative approach in providing additional capital are some of the incentives that come with distributing leadership (Cowie & Crawford, 2008; Spillane et al., 2015). On the

²⁵ (Mestry, 2017; Montecinos et al., 2018; Spillane & Lee, 2014; Wieczorek & Manard, 2018)

²⁶ (Arar, 2018; Meyer & Patuawa, 2022; Montecinos et al., 2018; Spillane & Lee, 2014; Wieczorek & Manard, 2018)

other hand, their positionality as the CEOs, entrusted with the ultimate responsibility and influenced by “the buck stops with you” mentality and the fear of being thrown under the bus, may deter novices and encourage a more singular leadership approach (Spillane et al., 2015). Unsure and not yet confident, they rely on trial and error, which comes with unpredictability and uncertainty as they are still gaining approval from learners, teachers, and parents who may not avail their support to the newly appointed leaders (Wieczorek & Manard, 2018).

Another challenge they face is dealing with ineffective and resistant staff²⁷. In other instances, the staff’s resistance manifests through opposition to new ideas to facilitate change (Wieczorek & Manard, 2018). This challenge strains novices in multiple ways. The first strain deals with the energy they have to discharge to deal with these situations, which typically play out over a long period (Clarke & Wildy, 2008; Spillane & Lee, 2014). Additionally, as a person of authority, they often feel overwhelmed and under-prepared with the know-how to support, reprimand, and counsel these difficult staff members (Spillane & Lee, 2014).

In a local study on novice principals leading township and rural schools, Sepuru and Mohlakwana (2020) found that novice principals struggle with stakeholder relations. They reported a lack of parental support and poor parental involvement and participation. They also mentioned strained relations between themselves and unions. The NPs in this study assumed that unions would be supportive agents. Instead, they found them to be unsupportive and confrontational. The NPs found it challenging to navigate the tensions of this relationship because of the arrogant attitudes of unions during stakeholder meetings.

2.8.3 On-job Realities: Experiences Related to the Place

The focus on place relates to contextual literacy and intuition. Clarke and Wildy (2013) state that contextual literacy gives school leaders contextual awareness, enabling their understanding of internal and external contextual complexities. These include the “socioeconomic, demographic, cultural and historical composition of the community” from which it draws its learner population (Clarke & Wildy, 2013, p. 35). It also includes the school culture. Contextual literacy is crucial because it guides decision-making and aids principals in determining the schools’ interests and priorities (Clarke & Wildy, 2013).

School culture influences school effectiveness. When toxic, it places schools in precarious situations where their legitimacy is threatened (Spillane et al., 2015). In schools facing this

²⁷ (Clarke & Wildy, 2008; Colina & Boone, 2008; Nelson et al., 2008; Spillane & Lee, 2014)

legitimacy crisis, there are other additional challenges, including poor student and teacher attendance, low staff morale and commitment, and a student and parent population who have lost faith in their school and take no pride in it (Spillane et al., 2015). Novice principals entering schools under threat face the pressure of changing the tide and repairing the school's legitimacy, often under tight timelines (Spillane et al., 2015). They must evaluate existing systems and influence change so that prevailing conditions can change.

People and places intersect when it comes to the school culture. In some instances, whether intentionally or not, toxicity has become institutionalized (Montecinos et al., 2018), and those in the school have become accustomed to the culture and routines (Spillane & Lee, 2014). Initiating change is perceived as a threat to the way of life, a challenge to the status quo, and is resisted (Montecinos, 2018; Spillane & Lee, 2014). In such schools, roles and responsibilities are blurred, with most staff not sticking and performing in the expected ways (Montecinos et al., 2018). Such a situation is highly challenging for novice principals. They experience the emotional burden and strain of restoring the school's legitimacy and attempting to establish their legitimacy by demonstrating leadership ability as a new principal (Lord & Hall, 2005; Spillane et al., 2015).

2.8.4 On-job Realities: Experiences Related to the Systems

Experiences related to systems concern leaders' knowledge and skills to work through complex policies, regulations, and protocols (Clarke & Wildy, 2013). Systems are interconnected to people because an attempt to influence systems will affect people. Like all other principals, novice principals are tasked with implementing continuous policy changes (Cheung & Walker, 2006). These mandates require new knowledge and a strong need for leadership to cope with and adapt to this change (Bhengu & Myende, 2015), which novices seldom possess. Sepuru and Mohlakwana (2020) found that NPs lacked knowledge and understanding of educational laws and policies. The principals also had limited expertise in policy implementation and formulation at the school level. Some of the principals in this study were also appointed in schools where no school-based policies were in place, and they found it challenging to lead the policy formulation process at this level.

Additionally, NPs report challenges relating to financial management. In Sepuru and Mohlakwana's (2020) study, the findings reveal that principals struggle with financial management as this function is not part of their previous roles. Similar results emerge from Spillane and Lee (2014), where NPs reported difficulty managing the school budget (Spillane

& Lee, 2014). Though it is envisaged that this responsibility is a function of the SGB as a collective, Mestry (2004) avers that, despite these policy expectations, this task is relegated to principals in most rural schools. This may pose a significant challenge for NPs, who may not have the capacity to execute it. Reporting on NPs and their management practices, Myende et al. (2018) found that the principals realised their shortcomings in this regard and invested time to develop capacity in their financial management. The NPs took a similar stance in Sepuru and Mohlakwana's (2020) work, where some principals requested the support and help of the principals of their previous schools to aid their learning for financial management activities.

Another systemically related complexity relates to curriculum management. The NPs in Sepuru and Mohlakwana's (2020) study found themselves underprepared to lead and manage this task. The complications were even more so for those who had moved from primary to secondary schools and vice versa. One of the participating principals expressed immense frustration because they had been promoted from a special school to an ordinary school with a highly differentiated curriculum. Like the others in the study, this principal was expected to be professionally developed for this curriculum management as it requires specialised curriculum knowledge and training they did not have from their previous experiences.

Lastly, NPs experience systemic-related challenges in terms of human resource management. Montecinos et al. (2018), studying NPs in Chile, found that their systemic-related challenges are linked to having no autonomy in staffing decisions because of centralized systemic processes. Another study (Sepuru & Mohlakwana, 2020) reported that NPs did not know how to engage in various activities about human resource management. These included processing and dealing with varied leave applications, facilitating and presiding over meetings, timetabling and duty load allocation, and processes involved in staff promotion. In the study cited above, the principals expected a formal handover once appointed where they would be inducted and capacitated on human resource-related matters. However, such support was not provided.

This section has illuminated the experiences of novice principals. It highlights the complexities and intricacies experienced simultaneously as NPs transition through the initiation phase of their leadership. It has illustrated how they contend with multiple factors relating to the self, the people they lead, the places they lead, and the systems they use and engage with as they navigate leading as novice principals. The following section provides a conclusion to this chapter.

2.9 Chapter Conclusion

This chapter has provided a review of literature through an exploration of local and global insights. Learning from other explorers and leaning on what is already known, the chapter commenced with a brief glimpse into the historical ambit of the manifestation of deprivation in South Africa. Looking to the past, I discussed factors that created the fertile ground for the emergence of deprivation and how these continue to persist in present-day society. The following sections fully cover multiple deprivations. First, I highlighted the contestations around the concept as a research framing tool. Secondly, using the five domains of multiple deprivations, I clarified each domain's meaning, how it manifests in KZN, the province in which this study is conducted, and how each domain independently impacts schooling. Thirdly, from the scarce body of literature, I elucidated how the combined effects of multiple deprivations affect schools and school leaders. Fourthly, I drew on other explorers to gain insights into how principals in such contexts navigate leadership.

The discussion then turns to the issue of identity, which is a central component of this study. In this section, I argued for the significance of identity in leadership discourse and discussed factors around leader identity development. The chapter then focused on issues around novice principals. In this section, I first discussed role transitioning complexities which feature significantly in the initiation phase. The following section covered the on-job realities and experiences of novice principals. These were categorically discussed through issues concerning the self, people, place, and systems. The next chapter discusses the theoretical framework undergirding this study.

CHAPTER THREE

SENSE-MAKING, ADAPTIVE AND CONTEXT RESPONSIVE LEADERSHIP: COMPASS GUIDING MY JOURNEY

3.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I will discuss the theoretical framework informing this study. Varpio et al. (2020, p. 990) state that “a theory is an abstract description of the relationships between concepts that help us to understand the world,” serving as a compass to scaffold understanding. The framework consists of selected theories that undergird one’s thinking regarding how one understands and plans the research (Grant & Osanloo, 2014). It provides the grounding base or an anchor for the study and becomes the foundation from which all knowledge is constructed (Grant & Osanloo, 2014; Patten & Newhart, 2018).

This study is undergirded by sense-making, adaptive leadership, and context-responsive leadership as the theoretical framework. The framework in this study will serve as the compass, a tool I will use to understand and explain the lived experiences of novice principals leading in deprived schools. The three theories are discussed by presenting their components and then demonstrating their appropriateness for the study. The last section ties the three theories together, illustrating the significance of the framework as a lens for this study.

3.2 Sense-Making Theory: A Social Process

The sense-making theory is one of the frames used as a lens to gain insight into novice principal’s lived experiences. Sense-making gained prominence through Weick’s (1995) seminal work and has since been used in various fields within management and organisation studies. There is much debate on the meanings and understanding attached to sense-making, with scholars expressing different schools of thought (Maitlis & Christiansen, 2014). One branch of scholars subscribes to sense-making as a cognitive process that occurs intrinsically (Hill & Levenhagen, 1995; Starbuck & Milliken, 1988). Other scholars view it as a social process between people and their environments (Coburn, 2006; Maitlis, 2005; Rouleau, 2005; Rutledge, 2009; Weick, 1995). This study subscribes to the latter position. Justifying this choice is the nature of the exploration. This study endeavoured to gain insights into novice principals’ leadership identities and practices in deprived schools. It acknowledges the social situatedness of the practices, the individuals who enact them within a particular environment,

engaging with this environment and the people in and around it, concerned with their identities, and consciously negotiating the appropriate self to be presented for a specific situation.

From the social perspective, sense-making is a process whereby individuals systematically work to understand issues that are “novel, ambiguous, confusing, or in some other way violate expectations” (Maitlis & Christiansen, 2014, p.58). Cues trigger it. Cues are ambiguous issues, occurrences, or conditions that disrupt existing understandings of the world and create uncertainty (Weick, 1995). Through sense-making, individuals attempt to subsequently create rational accounts of these issues to enable action in circumstances where there is no obvious way to engage (Weick et al., 2005; Maitlis & Christiansen, 2014).

3.2.1 The Seven Properties of Sense-Making

By looking at sense-making as a social process, Weick (1995) offers seven properties of sense-making. These properties emphasise the idea that sense-making is grounded in identity construction; it is social; it is retrospective; it focuses on enactment; it is ongoing and continuous; extracted cues guide it, and it is driven by plausibility as opposed to accuracy (Weick, 1995).

3.2.1.1 Grounded in Identity Construction

The first property is identity construction, which is foregrounded on the assumption that sense-making is self-referential and begins with the self (Weick, 1995). This is because who we are and our experiences shape our lives and influence our perspectives on how we view the world (Mills et al., 2010). Therefore, how the situation is perceived depends on who one is and who one will be in responding to that situation (Weick, 1995). “Depending on who I am, my definition of what is ‘out there’ will also change” (Weick, 1995, p. 20).

However, identity is not static. It is in a constant state of reconstruction and redefinition as we continually experience new things and negotiate with which self or part of self is appropriate, should be presented to others, or must be let go (Weick, 1995). In this negotiation, decisions are made, considering their consequences on how their outcomes will represent who one is and who one will be, based on those decisions (Weick, 1995).

3.2.1.2 Social

Using sense-making as a social process, it follows that the presence of “others” must be acknowledged. It does not happen in isolation but is contingent on one’s interactions with others and the contexts in which lives unfold (Mills et al., 2010; Weick, 1995). Individuals studying sense-making pay attention to social interactions, talk, discourse and conversation

because these activities are mediums through which social contact is mediated (Weick, 1995). The episteme guides social interactions. Episteme refers to the underlying “rules of formation” that guide and dictate “what constitutes legitimate forms of knowledge for a particular period” (Foucault, 1970 in Leary & Chia, 2007, p. 4) and what constitutes appropriate actions and behaviours. It guides what we view as a plausible, coherent account (O’Leary & Chia, 2007).

3.2.1.3 *Retrospective*

The property of retrospect acknowledges that in the sense-making process, individuals draw information from what has already happened when analysing what is happening. Therefore, sense-making relies on processing past experiences and using them to make sense of current events (Mills et al., 2010). In being retrospective, the individual is confronted with equivocality (Weick, 1995). It is thus imperative to be clear on the values, priorities, and preferences of what matters and what is needed in this regard (Weick, 1995). The episteme will influence what matters and is required (Leary & Chia, 2007). What has already happened shapes the episteme. As a result, individuals need to sift through the multiple layers of information and meanings and synthesize them to focus on what they encounter (Weick, 1995).

3.2.1.4 *Focused on and by Extracted Cues*

“Extracted cues are simple, familiar structures that are seeds from which people develop a larger sense of what may be occurring” (Weick, 1995, p. 50). Extraction happens on two different occasions (Weick, 1995). The first is ambiguity, created by multiple interpretations of an event (Weick, 1995). The other is uncertainty, which results from a lack of or ignorance regarding understanding (Weick, 1995). By focusing and extracting, the sense-maker notices certain things or events while ignoring others (Mills et al., 2010). Once these cues have been noticed, bracketed, and extracted from the flux of happenings, the phenomenon that creates uncertainty can then be labelled and categorized, thus enabling stability and focus from the flux of experience (Weick et al., 2005). Extraction of cues is by context, and contextual features, no matter how small or subtle, can significantly affect sense-making (Weick, 1995). It is driven by retrospective inquiry, which is influenced by the episteme dependent on identities, who one is, and who one will become once the action is taken (Mills et al., 2010; Weick, 1995).

3.2.1.5 *Enactive of Sensible Environments*

Having located the appropriate selves, they want to show up, sift through experience, and extract the cues that need immediate attention; individuals need to enact their decision and act. Enactment is the action undertaken given what has been sensed (Weick, 1995). Weick (1995)

argues that enactment is a central part of sense-making as the world can only be known by taking actions and seeing the consequence of those actions.

Actions serve multiple functions. First, the action generates a new set of cues that inform further action (Weick, 1988). Secondly, the action is a provisional test for meanings generated from prior sense-making (Maitlis & Christiansen, 2014). Thirdly, actions alter the environment because, through action, a new set of cues is produced (Maitlis & Christiansen, 2014). Subsequently, by changing their settings, those environments also change individuals and how they will further engage (Weick, 1995). As a result, “people create their environments as those environments create them” (Weick, 1995, p. 34).

3.2.1.6 Ongoing and Continuous

Enactment results in sense-making being ongoing and continuous. In each moment in time, something is happening. In the midst of all that is happening, people can bracket and notice cues from their environment and locate circumstances and situations that propel them to engage in sense-making (Weick, 1995; Weick et al., 2005). As they enact their actions, things continue to happen, and their actions create a new set of events in the already ongoing flow of events. There is no way to isolate an event as a separate entity. It is part of the happenings, leading to further incidents within the current events. It is thus “ongoing, and neither starts fresh nor stops cleanly” (Weick, 1995, p. 49).

3.2.1.7 Driven by Plausibility

Driving the process is searching for plausible accounts and responses, not accuracy (Weick, 1995; Weick et al., 2005; Rutledge, 2009). A plausible account or action conforms to some underlying structure of expectation, some episteme, or some form of implicit understanding about what constitutes an acceptable and justifiable system of beliefs (Leary & Chia, 2007, p. 4). It is “about accounts that are socially acceptable and credible” (Weick, 1995, p.61). It is about the ongoing and continuous “redrafting of an emerging story so that it becomes more comprehensive, incorporates more observed data, and its product is more resilient in the face of criticism” (Weick et al., 2005, p. 415).

3.2.1.8 Sense-Making Theory and its Appropriateness for this Study

Novice principals are in the initiation phase. This phase is a transitional phase characterised by multiple demands. They are cultivating their leadership identities, skills, and required expertise while leading people forward in schools that, for the most part, have stagnated or are on a downward trajectory. Consequently, this experience is like a tsunami, disrupting their existing

understandings and creating uncertainty (Weick, 1995). Leaders tasked with influencing others should be concerned with their identities. In addressing these concerns, they should retrospectively draw on their past to ascertain which cues they should notice, bracket, and extract. Having chosen from the flux of occurrences with others, they should create plans of action to respond to the immediate cues guided by the episteme. As they extract and enact, they consistently seek the appropriate selves to be presented to others to preserve their leader identity. Thus, they should acknowledge these others in the process and act in mindfulness that any plausible account must be context-specific (Weick, 1995). It must preserve their leader identity and be a good story to those around them if it is to be deemed a coherent and socially acceptable account (Weick, 1995). They should attempt to create a new set of selves, cues, and perceptions of self through enacting, allowing themselves to shape and be shaped by the context and those around them. The NPs must recognise that this process is ongoing and continuous without a definite beginning or end.

3.3 Adaptive Leadership Theory

The second theory to form part of the framework for this study is the Adaptive Leadership theory. It serves as a tool to cope and deal with challenges in one's professional and personal space to rise above and thrive against those challenges (Heifetz et al., 2009). In this study, NPs contend with rogue waves. These waves arise from the job pressure, their novice positionality, and the context in which they lead. The assumption is that by taking on this leadership role and understanding its expectations to some extent, NPs aim to succeed and thrive in their positions. According to Heifetz et al. (2009), this leadership approach is utilized by individuals to tackle tough and challenging circumstances to thrive (Heifetz et al., 2009).

The concept of thriving is borrowed from evolutionary biology, in which successful adaptation has three characteristics (Heifetz et al., 2009). Successful adaptation “preserves the DNA essential for the species’ continued survival, it discards (reregulates or rearranges) the DNA that no longer serves the species’ current needs, and it creates DNA arrangements that give the species the ability to flourish in new ways and more challenging environments” (Heifetz et al., 2009, p. 14). Looking at the characteristics presented above and the intricacy of successful adaptation, Heifetz (2003) emphasizes that “thriving is more than coping” (p. 76). It can transform the capacity of a species, alter the ecosystem, and spark an ongoing and profound process of adaptive change that significantly ushers in a new, better way of existence (Heifetz, 2003).

Heifetz et al. (2009) illustrate the application of this theory through an analogy. Like the field of medicine, these scholars view the practice of leadership as being centred on two core processes and activities. The first activity involves diagnosing the situation, while the second action is the subsequent diagnosis response (Heifetz et al., 2009). “You diagnose what is happening in your organization and take action to address the problems identified “(Heifetz et al., 2009, p. 6). To lead effectively, leaders also have to introspect, work on and attend to themselves in the context of the presented challenge (Heifetz et al., 2009). It is thus twofold, unfolding along two interlinked dimensions. One is the organizational system (the school), and the other is intrinsically motivated, requiring self-reflexivity. Leaders must self-introspect to better craft interventions for their complex schools and communities (Heifetz et al., 2009). They must simultaneously have a perspective on the systemic contexts in which they lead (Heifetz et al., 2009).

3.3.1 Assessing the Danger of the Uncharted Terrain

Leaders attempting to thrive must have the skill and capacity to diagnose (Heifetz et al., 2009). Diagnosis requires one to distance themselves from the on-the-ground events (Heifetz et al., 2009). These scholars use the metaphor of “getting on the balcony” above the dance floor (Heifetz et al., 2009, p. 7). Standing on the balcony gives the leader a distanced perspective of what is happening. It allows the leader to listen to the music, look at the dance moves, observe those who are not interested in the festivities and ask themselves am I enjoying these festivities? Is it going well? What can I do to get everyone in the festive mood? Has this been a successful event? A leader does not stay on the balcony. They move back and forth between the balcony and the dance floor to continually gain insights into what is happening in the school and take corrective action to ensure the event’s success (Heifetz et al., 2009).

The process of diagnosis is reiterative, beginning with “data collection and problem identification (the what), moving through the interpretive stage (the why)- exploring multiple possible interpretations of the situation and on to the potential approaches and interventions (the what next) which are available to the school” (Heifetz et al., 2009, p. 6). It requires leaders to withstand the pressure for quick fixes and the pressure to solve problems quickly (Heifetz et al., 2009). This process requires patience and resilience, as many will not see the value in taking time for a diagnosis. It may be unsettling to people who look to you for clarity, certainty, and immediate solutions (Heifetz et al., 2009).

3.3.2 The Different Types of Waves: Technical and Adaptive Challenges

The leadership terrain is charged with turbulence. Linsky and Lawrence (2011) state that 21st-century school leaders “are intimately entangled with the broader, deeper challenges facing the global community, reaching far beyond the distinctive qualities of education” (p. 4). Similarly, Heifetz (2003) asserts that leadership is enacted in the context of problems and challenges. Scholars (Heifetz, 1994; Heifetz, 2003; Heifetz et al., 2009a; Heifetz et al., 2009b) distinguish between two challenges facing modern-day organizations. They are categorised as technical and adaptive challenges.

Challenges arise when there is some form of misalignment or gap in expected outcomes or reality (Heifetz, 2010). When problems, challenges, or situations are technical, there is a known response as adequate preparations have been made for the current circumstance (Heifetz, 1994). “Procedures, lines of authority, role placements, and norms of operation have been established” (Heifetz; 1994, p. 125) to serve as possible responses. The misalignment and gap can thus be addressed by applying and drawing on existing knowledge and understandings (Heifetz, 2003). Heifetz (2003) further suggests that technical problems do not necessarily demand leadership but require authoritative and managerial expertise.

Contrary to this, modern organizations encounter adaptive challenges. Adaptive challenges exist where the problem or situation lies outside the current way of operating (Heifetz, 2003). They are adaptive because the response to these is seldom known (Heifetz, 2003). As earlier stated, schools contend with broader, more profound challenges present not only in their localised contexts. However, adaptive challenges can emanate even within the local contexts.

Irrespective of the source, adaptive challenges present a situation where existing solutions fail to address the case, and current ways of understanding and operating do not suffice as a remedy (Heifetz, 2003). These challenges call for leadership because they require a change in the current ways of thinking, doing, and being to overcome (Heifetz, 2010). Adaptive challenges are like rogue waves with the potential to depress leadership efforts and initiatives such that it becomes impossible to advance.

3.3.3 Surviving the Rogue Waves

Leaders cannot avoid adaptive challenges. They have to diagnose and distinguish between the challenges and then be able to navigate the adaptive ones to ensure they first survive before they can even think about thriving. Surviving adaptive challenges requires change. Linsky and Lawrence (2011) aver that these changes must alter people’s values, beliefs, habits, and

loyalties. Leading change is challenging because change comes with potential loss (Heifetz, 2010). This scholar states that it is not the change that people resist but the possible losses (Linsky & Lawrence, 2011). Thus, engaging in adaptive work becomes a rogue wave because disrupting the status quo is dangerous and risky (Linsky & Lawrence, 2011).

Given the precarity of the work, leaders must take time to diagnose, assess, manage, and provide context and support for the losses people experience (Linsky & Lawrence, 2011). They must diagnose which trade-offs can be made to ensure successful adaptation, enabling the school to take the best from its traditions, identity, and history into the future (Heifetz, 2003; Linsky & Lawrence, 2011).

Heifetz (2003) states that surviving the rogue waves requires a clear direction and plan. The activities that concern leadership in the short term involve mobilizing and sensitizing people to change and to meet an immediate challenge (Heifetz, 2003). In the medium term, leadership thrives on altering the environment by influencing a new set of cultural norms, which capacitate people to meet an ongoing set of adaptive realities and pressure (Heifetz, 2003). The product of this is the long-term outcome is an organization with adaptive capacity and adaptability (Heifetz, 2010).

To influence this change and meet the short, medium, and long-term goals, leaders need to understand the nature of adaptive challenges and how to navigate them. Heifetz (2003, p.74) asserts that “adaptive challenges demand learning.” Learning requires retooling one’s ways of thinking and operating, and it is through learning that the gaps and aspirations become smaller (Heifetz, 2010). Furthermore, adaptive challenges require people to distinguish between what is dispensable and what is indispensable in the current cultural norms (Heifetz, 2003). To successfully adapt, a leader must understand the components of the cultural DNA that can be left behind, those that are no longer helpful, and those that need to be preserved (Heifetz, 2003). A further premise regarding adaptive challenges demands experimentation (Heifetz, 2003). As already stated, there is no known effective response to overcome adaptive challenges. Therefore, schools must conduct a series of experiments regarding possible, viable means of recourse because it is through this that solutions on how best to deal with the challenge can be found (Heifetz, 2003). Lastly, the process of learning, the process of altering the current status quo in the cultural norms, and the process of experimentation take time. It, therefore, follows that adaptive work takes time (Heifetz, 2003). Because of the uncertainty and the disturbance caused by adaptive challenges, individuals may attempt to hastily engage in activities that

restore equilibrium, thus compromising adaptive work and inevitably leading to an adaptive failure (Heifetz, 2003).

3.3.4 Adaptive Leadership Theory and its Appropriateness for this Study

Being a novice principal comes with professional and personal challenges, already highlighted in the previous chapters. These challenges are rogue waves to newly appointed principals with limited data on how to mitigate them. The context of deprivation also presents calculated challenges that depress even seasoned principals' leadership. This suggests that when these two intersect when a novice has to lead in a deprived context, the challenges intensify and exacerbate. Against this turbulence, the role of principalship comes with the expectation of providing sound leadership to affect student outcomes positively. We can presume that novice principals enter their office intending to survive and thrive.

Presumably, to thrive, novice principals should diagnose, and through this diagnostic, they may achieve multiple things. First, perched on the balcony, they should look at themselves to understand what they know, what they need to know, and what they must do to know. They should also look at their schools' diagnosing and differentiating between the technical and adaptive challenges. Through this diagnostic work, they could then have to use various mechanisms to navigate the rogue waves, cognisant of being tactful of the dynamics of change and resistance that may come with it. These principals will have to make tough choices on what practices must be retained and what must be left behind to ensure that they can drive school improvement.

3.4 Context-Responsive Leadership

The third theory undergirding this study is context-responsive leadership. There is a consensus that context impacts leadership practices²⁸. Bredeson et al. (2011) add that context and leadership have a reciprocal relationship. These scholars describe context-responsive leadership as a practical application of wisdom demonstrated by using knowledge, skills, and other virtues to deploy leadership in response to dynamic and temperamental contextual variables (Bredeson et al., 2011). Unlike traditional leadership theories, which are predisposed

²⁸ (Brauckmann-Sajkiewicz & Pashiardis, 2022; Bredeson et al., 2011; Hallinger, 2018; Leithwood et al., 2004; Leithwood et al., 2020)

to a specific behaviour style, context-responsive leaders shape their behaviours and practices based on contextual settings (Bredeson et al., 2011). It is the leadership action based and guided by the context. It cannot be decontextualized as it is embedded in the prevailing conditions and a response to a particular contextual dynamic or situation.

3.4.1 The Variations of Contexts

Bredeson et al. (2011) highlight multiple variations of context. They are the “school district size, organizational culture, community context, and geographic location, the fiscal context, and the political context” (Bredeson et al., 2011, p. 9). In this study, the variations are embedded and attached to the deprived context. Each of these, in different ways, creates dynamic situations for practice, enabling or constraining leadership enactment (Bredeson et al., 2011). Context-responsive leaders operate conscious of these contexts, navigating the uncertain and challenging situations they reproduce. They “know when, where, why, and how to push back or reshape elements of context to provide a more favourable environment for achieving priorities and goals” (Bredeson et al., 2011, p. 20).

The variations of contexts imply that there is no set of key behaviours and attributes for context-responsive leadership (Bredeson et al., 2011). What is known is that context-responsive leaders are contextually literate and aware – navigating leadership with sensitivity to the contexts in which they lead, their purpose and vision, and the consequences of their actions (Bredeson et al., 2011). They are flexible and engage consciously and dialogically with situations of practice and the ebbing and flowing dimensions of time, historical background, imagined futures, people, and place (Bredeson et al., 2011). They acknowledge the variations in context, critically assessing the elements that constrain or enable their leadership and seek to find appropriate responses at the right time to act to shape their contexts (Bredeson et al., 2011).

3.4.2 Using Contextual Intelligence

Some level of contextual intelligence presumably guides the effectiveness of these leaders. According to Kutz (2008), contextual intelligence is “the ability to recognize and diagnose the plethora of contextual factors inherent in an event or circumstance, then intentionally and intuitively adjust behaviour to exert influence in that context” (p. 18). It requires the tact to intuitively grasp past events, acutely process the present and use these assessments to create an imagined future that may seem untenable against what was and is. Such leaders draw from their instincts guided by their past experiences, their consciousness of the prevailing circumstantial conditions, and their foresight on what they will be in their future circumstances (Kutz, 2008).

Leaders guided by contextual intelligence can act and behave accordingly, such that their actions and behaviours produce favourable outcomes.

3.4.3 Context-Responsive Theory and its Appropriateness for this Study

Leading in a deprived school context presents leaders with multiple dynamic and temperamental variables. Deprivation influences the other context variations. We can assume that novice leaders accept their positions to advance school improvement. Such efforts require sensitivity to context variations such that leadership practices are contextualised and fitting to reshape the environments in which they are enacted.

3.5 Bringing the Theories Together

In this study, these three theories work together to explain the intricate journey of novice leaders leading in schools in deprived context. They provide explanatory value to dynamics of self, practice, and context. Sense-making theory is essential in brining meaning to how novice principals understand and comprehend their roles within the deprived context. During the initiation phase and transitional dynamics, this theory illuminates how they construct their leadership identities, draw meaning from their experiences, and use them to inform their leadership. By delving into how these principals make sense of ambiguous situations and events concerning themselves, their practice, and the context, sense-making theory provides valuable insights into the sense-making processes they engage in to navigate uncertainties and complexities.

Similarly, adaptive leadership theory provides insights into how principals diagnose and understand the challenges they encounter in deprived contexts, including those related to their newness as novice principals. It offers a framework for analysing how they interpret contextual variables and adapt their approaches to embrace change, encourage innovation, and foster resilience while leading their schools through adversities concerning themselves, their practice, and the context.

Complementing these theories, context-responsive theory plays an integral role in comprehending the impact of deprived contexts on the leadership of novice principals. It emphasizes the importance of understanding and responding to the unique needs and challenges presented by the deprived context, guiding novice principals in adopting tailored leadership approaches. By thoughtfully considering the distinctive characteristics of the

context and the specific needs of their schools, novice principals adjust their leadership repertoire and reshape their personal and professional identities.

The integration of sense-making, adaptive leadership, and context-responsive theories forms a powerful theoretical framework that provides valuable insights into the experiences, actions, and motivations of novice principals leading schools in deprived contexts. This framework elucidates how these leaders make sense of and diagnose the challenges they face, how they lead and what guides their leadership decisions and actions as they navigate their roles in schools facing deprivation.

3.6 Chapter Conclusion

This chapter discussed the compass of this study, that is, the theoretical framework undergirding it used to give meaning to who novice principals are, how they lead schools in a deprived context, and what influences their leadership practices. The three theories, sense-making, adaptive leadership, and context-responsive theories constituting the framework, were discussed using their various components. Following each discussion was a justification of its appropriateness for the current study. The last section brought the theories together, and through an illustration, the framework was presented, and its suitability for the inquiry was justified. The following chapter brings to light the tools, processes, and procedures used in this study to generate data.

CHAPTER FOUR

WAYS OF KNOWING THE NOVICE PRINCIPALS' VOYAGES: RESEARCH PROCESSES AND PROCEDURES

4.1 Introduction

The previous chapter presented the framework used to explain and understand the maiden voyage of novice principals chartering into an unknown terrain of leading deprived schools. This chapter presents the ways of knowing: the research processes and procedures used to generate data to respond to the research puzzles. The chapter begins with a discussion of the interpretive paradigm, the paradigmatic stance adopted in this study. I justify the paradigm's suitability for this inquiry by discussing its ontological, epistemological, and methodological assumptions. The qualitative research design is then discussed, followed by the narrative inquiry methodology. The data generation method, life history interviews, is then discussed. In this section, I further explain the triggers: life story grid and collage inquiry used in this study to solicit remembering. In discussing the life history interviews, I also describe how the interview process unfolded to generate the field texts. The chapter then turns to the sampling methods: purposive sampling and snowballing. Within this section, I also profile the novice principals and their schools using data from the life story grids and transect walks. The following section provides a detailed outline of the dual analysis of field texts. This analysis entails the first level of restoring the narratives (narrative analysis) and the second level analysis (analysis of narratives) from which the themes emerged. Before the conclusion, the discussion details the issues concerned with trustworthiness and the ethical considerations observed throughout the process.

4.2 The Paradigmatic Positioning of the Study

The paradigmatic stance adopted in this study is the interpretive paradigm. This paradigm's worldview focuses on understanding human behaviour and experience (Cohen et al., 2017; Creswell & Poth, 2016; Thanh & Thanh, 2015). This inquiry is about tales detailing the journeys of novice principals leading schools in deprived contexts. The study intended to explore the routes they take, their similarities or differences, and the nature of leadership decisions they use to navigate their journey. I want to understand their journeys; hence I have located this study in the interpretive paradigm.

In discussing the paradigm, I will use the ontological, epistemological, and methodological assumptions to justify my choice for locating my work within the interpretive paradigm.

Ontological assumptions are concerned with the nature of reality and its related characteristics (Cohen et al., 2017; Creswell & Poth, 2016; Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Epistemological assumptions refer to the nature and forms of knowledge (Cohen et al., 2017; Creswell & Poth, 2016; Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Lastly, the methodological assumptions guide researchers on how knowledge can be acquired and understood (Cohen et al., 2017; Creswell & Poth, 2016; Guba & Lincoln, 1994). These assumptions are discussed below, and through their characteristics, I will demonstrate the paradigm's appropriateness.

4.2.1 “A detour from Absolute Truths”: The Ontological Assumptions

Absolute truths align with post-positivist research (Scotland, 2012), a notion from which interpretivism distances itself. Interpretive research is foregrounded on the assumption that reality is a subjective phenomenon constructed on the interpretations and the meanings people attach to an event (Scotland, 2012). Human beings are consciously engaged, with their world, participating in it, moulding it, and co-constructing meanings about it and themselves through these interactions (Crotty, 1998; Heron & Reason, 1997; Scotland, 2012).

Consequently, reality is perceived to be a socially constructed experience. Because of this principle, there are as many realities and perspectives as there are individuals experiencing a particular phenomenon (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Scotland, 2012; Willis, 2007). Morehouse (2011) asserts that acknowledging multiple realities and perspectives provides a more comprehensive understanding of a situation. As a result, situations are not fixed or static but evolve over time and place, thus making reality a multi-layered and complex phenomenon (Cohen et al., 2011).

If reality is mediated through experiences and meaning-making is subjective and socially constructed, it follows that those best positioned to provide accounts of the incident are those engaged in that activity (Cohen et al., 2011; Mack, 2010). In other words, interpretive researchers operate under the tenet that reality can best be understood by those who have an experience of what it means to be in a particular situation. Guba and Lincoln (1994) add that an adequate response to “how things really are” and “how things really work” can be best found in those with first-hand experience of the phenomenon (p. 108).

Drawing from these assumptions, this paradigm is well suited for the inquiry because I wanted to understand lived experience in this study. Lived experience is subjective. It manifests and is brought to life as people engage with their social contexts. Though all the participating novice principals led schools in deprived contexts, each school has unique characteristics. Each

principal has a different set of past experiences and identities. As such, each construed reality is different. The novice principals are best positioned to share these experiences as they are the ones engaged in the leadership of their schools. In this study, there are four novice principals, each providing a tale about their journey to acknowledge the multiple realities in the same phenomenon of leading schools located in deprived contexts.

4.2.2 “My Experience is my Truth”: The Epistemological Assumptions

Interpretivist researchers believe knowledge is a subjective construction, culturally derived and historically situated (Cohen et al., 2011; Scotland, 2012). It is a product of construction, not some entity waiting to be discovered (Scotland, 2012). From this premise, personal ideologies are accepted rather than rejected (Scotland, 2012). The participants’ life stories serve as the data source in this study. Stories have tenets of being culturally and historically situated personal accounts told at a point in time. Nash (2004) posits that the best way to make sense of the world, to understand what is out there, is through the construction and telling of our stories, as these are interlaced and embedded with the social contexts in which lives are lived. Thus, the acceptance of personal ideologies warrants the acknowledgment that the stories that NPs narrate hold true as they are informed by their subjective experiences and ideological perspectives of the world.

In this paradigm, as knowledge construction is naturalistic, it places a responsibility on the researcher to establish mutually inclusive relationships with their participants (Cohen et al., 2017). As will be discussed elsewhere, I took time to cultivate such relationships in this study as they ensured that participants could freely share their stories and narrate their experiences. I also ensured that our engagements were conversations, not rigid but allowing the participants to speak in the language of their choice. I gave participants the autonomy of their narratives, giving them control over what was shared, when, and how it was shared.

As already alluded to, interpretivism recognises contextual embeddedness and how this is interlaced with the creation of reality and construction of knowledge (Creswell, 2009). Reality and knowledge can only exist through interaction with others, the worlds in which people live and work, and the historical and cultural settings attached to place and time (Creswell, 2009; Terre Blanche et al., 2012). As such, interactions do not happen in a vacuum but are developed, enacted, and transmitted in particular social contexts (Crotty, 1998). This implies that the leadership experiences of NPs are constructed through their interaction with other people. NPs

leading schools in deprived contexts have an existence dependent on the context in which they lead (Cohen et al., 2011), and this also has a bearing, shaping their experiences and practices.

4.2.3 “How Can I Know what they Experience?”: The Methodological Assumptions

The ontological and epistemological assumptions underlying the interpretive paradigm also influence the processes used to co-construct knowledge and understand multiple realities. Thomas (2003) states that interpretivists usually support qualitative methods because the paradigm “portrays a world in which reality is socially constructed, complex, and ever-changing” (p. 6). In line with this, they rely on non-rigid methods that provide a dialogical space and room for people to share their experiences, interpret them, and attach meanings to them (Crotty, 1998; Thanh & Thanh, 2015). They are methods that seek to understand the depth of human relations to uncover the participants’ realities from their lived experiences (McQueen, 2002; Thanh & Thanh, 2015). These methods are also directed at uncovering the interactions among individuals and their environment, the historical and cultural contexts which shape people’s lives and experiences (Creswell, 2009).

In aligning with the paradigmatic stance, data was generated through life history interviews, using life story grids and collage inquiry as triggers to enhance the interview process (discussed later). The data generation approach ensured that the field texts produced had depth and provided a holistic account of the NPs’ storied lives.

4.3 Qualitative Research Design

This study used a qualitative research design. According to Denzin and Lincoln (2005), qualitative research involves an interpretive, naturalist approach where people or things are studied in their natural settings to make sense of and interpret phenomena and the meanings people bring to them and understand them. It is a design that provides a holistic perspective of social phenomena, emphasizing participants’ subjective views framed within a social-political and historical context (Creswell & Poth, 2016).

I journeyed to gain insight into the lived experience of novice principals, seeking to uncover who they are, how they lead, and what influences their leadership. Such a journey is complex, layered in the facets of experiences. Qualitative research served well as it is best suited to uncover and provide a detailed understanding of the multifaceted, intricate phenomena as those in this study (Creswell & Poth, 2016), thus capturing and preserving intrinsic complexities of human behaviour (Buston et al., 1998, Aguis, 2013). It is, therefore, best to explore

interpretivist research from the qualitative approach because it provides the means to understand the meanings people ascribe to a social problem (Creswell, 2009).

Furthermore, qualitative research is about understanding the phenomenon within its context (Aguis, 2013). Creswell and Poth (2016) state this design is best suited for understanding the contexts and settings in which participants experience a problem or issue. This nature of the design aligned well because much focus is placed on the context of enactment, which is influential on human experience and the actions that emanate from it (Creswell, 2008). In this study, context was a prominent variable. This design illuminated the context-embedded practices, uncovering the meanings of how the principals lead and why they lead in the ways they do. Additionally, qualitative research relies on engaging directly with those immersed in the experience, allowing them space to share their stories and hear their voices, unconstrained by preconceptions of what one expects to find or what one has read in literature (Creswell & Poth, 2016).

To capture the complexity of the lived experiences of NPs, there was a need to generate data that offered a high explanatory value. Research foregrounded in the qualitative approach endeavours to generate detailed thick descriptions, usually in the form of textual data and imagery, as opposed to numeric data produced in the quantitative traditions (Creswell & Poth, 2016; O'Dwyer & Bernauer, 2014). Life history interviews used with life story grids and collage inquiry provided these deep insights by describing and explaining the events and further giving meanings and interpretations of those events and the actions that emanated from them (Cohen et al., 2011; Aguis, 2013). These methods also allowed for the intersection of history and biography and created the platform to look at and imagine an anticipated future (Cohen et al., 2011). Given that this study assumes that their identity could influence how NPs lead, it became necessary to see how this identity had been shaped and needed to be shaped to ensure that anticipated futures and outcomes would be realised. More so, they gave room for understandings of what was happening. Keeping in line with the naturalistic inquiry of qualitative research, the methodology of narrative inquiry will guide this study.

4.4 Narrative Inquiry Methodology

In this study, I used narrative inquiry as the methodology. According to Clandinin and Connelly (2000), narrative inquiry is both a methodology and a phenomenon. Experience is a phenomenon mediated through stories (Clandinin & Connelly, 2006). Stories serve as a portal to provide a detailed and in-depth study of human experiences that spans over time and in

different contexts (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). As a methodology, narrative inquiry enables us to study people's experiences, intrinsically linked and embedded into human lives (Clandinin, 2020; Clandinin, 2013; Connelly & Clandinin, 2006). In my use of it in this work, I acknowledged this duality.

In this study, I sought to explore and understand the journey of being a novice principal leading a school located in a deprived context. I wanted to understand who the novice principals were before and during their tenure. I wanted to know how they navigated the unknown terrain of being principals while still transitioning and being tasked with leading in a context rife with challenges. I also wanted to know what informs their leadership and why they lead the way they do. Narrative inquiry served me well because it is well aligned for capturing personal and human dimensions of experience over time while taking cognisance of the relationship and connections between the individual and the contexts from which these emanate (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). This revealed nuances and intricacies associated with human experience (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). From this, a rich and complex canvas of the lived experience of novice principals was generated (Bell, 2002).

Amongst other ways, narrative inquiry relies on storytelling and narrating to understand the complexity of human experience and gain awareness of lived experience. Telling is a powerful tool because it "mediates experience" (Daiute, 2013, p. 4). Our lives are composed of our experiences, interactions with others, and environments (Caine et al., 2013). Stories thus allow us to understand, make meaning, mediate, and relate our experiences (Clandinin et al., 2011). Thus, Clandinin and Connelly (2006) state that human beings live storied lives.

From this premise, everyone has a story to tell. By telling our stories, we can make sense of and meaning of our experiences, actions, and lives (Beattie, 2000). Similarly, Bruner (1990) asserts that understanding the complexity of human behaviour begins with the stories people share about themselves and their involvement with others. In narrating their stories, the NPs could reconstruct their experiences and mediate their storied lives. This reiterative process occurred from the study's inception when the principals provided me with the data for their life story grids. Below I give some examples:

While we were doing the life story grid, Maqhinga, one of the participants, found himself questioning his preconceptions about who he considered his family. As he negotiated and challenged his thoughts, new understandings and meanings of who he regarded as his family emerged.

He thinks hard and pauses a bit, *“You know that question is so easy, but I want to think before I answer it.”* (Referring to the question about his family). After a couple of seconds, he clears his throat and responds:

There is the biological linkage, but from how I have grown up, I consider my friends more of my brothers than my actual blood brothers. My Mom is alive, but she is my Mom by birth. My aunt is my Mom.

This reconstruction continued as the principals created the collages. These are some of the sentiments that were shared:

In one of our engagements, Ntozinhle looked at her notes and her collage and said:

I am starting to doubt who I am. When I dig deep, there are so many layers of me. But these layers are intricately woven with other layers. I want to think about this deeply.

Speaking in a calm tone and looking at her collage, Miss Nzama seemed taken aback by her thoughts:

For so long, I have focused on what I am and what I do. I have forgotten why I am who I am or even who I am? What has motivated me? In all the living and doing, I am afraid to ask myself, “is what I do consistent with who I think I am?”

The conversations and reflections illustrate how narrative inquiry offered a platform for reflective conversations involving sharing, discussing, questioning, and reasoning about one’s experiences and actions (Humaira & Rarieya, 2008). In this space of reflexivity, the principals could make new meanings, question their preconceptions, and reshape their narratives of and about themselves. Bruner (1990) suggests that the construction of self is whatever story we construct about who we are. In this way, the telling evolved beyond the existing story, creating a new story. The telling itself shaped the story and its understanding in new ways.

Another significant characteristic of narrative inquiry is that it is conceptualised along three dimensions in a “metaphoric narrative inquiry space” (Clandinin, 2006, 2019; Clandinin et al., 2007). These dimensions are sociality, continuity, and context (Clandinin, 2006; 2019). To fully engage in narrative inquiry as a methodology, there must be a constant exploration of all these dimensions (Clandinin et al., 2007) because through working “within the three-dimensional relational space, we can attend to the living, telling, retelling, and reliving of stories of experience” (Caine et al., 2019, p. 266; Clandinin et al., 2007).

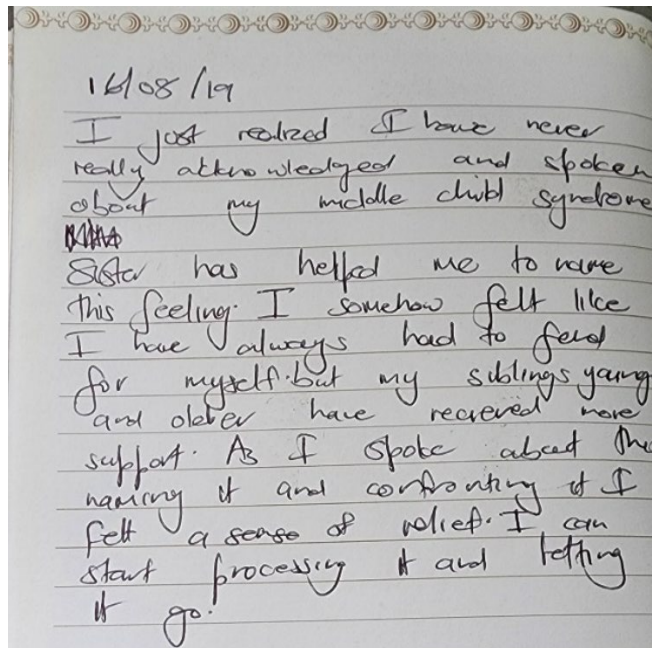
The first of these spaces is sociality. This dimension deals with one's interaction with the environment and the unique personal history produced from such interactions (Clandinin, 2006; 2013). It is a personal and social dimension (Clandinin, 2006; 2013). Delving deeper into the personal space, one sees that it is rooted in the self. It is about an individual's "feelings, hopes, desires, aesthetic reactions, and moral dispositions" (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006, p. 480). The social space includes the surrounding factors, forces, and people that are part of the individual's space (Clandinin et al., 2007). Through sociality, I was able to unearth and understand issues of identity. I gained insights into how and why novice principals enacted leadership, illuminating the contextual embeddedness of these practices (context of deprivation and being a novice) in confluence with other factors that shaped leadership enactment.

As a consequence of the sociality dimension, when the researcher enters into the participant's space, they enter into a relationship with them and become part of the metaphoric parade (Clandinin & Connelly, 1998; Clandinin et al., 2007). The narrative inquirer is part of the existential space and cannot bracket themselves from the inquiry process (Clandinin, 2006). The narrative inquirer needs to negotiate between the "inquiry into the participants' experiences, their own experiences, as well as the co-constructed experiences developed through the relational inquiry" (Clandinin, 2006, p. 47). Clandinin et al. (2019) state that researchers must recognise that they co-create with the participants.

In this research, this aspect has been very enriching to my participants and me. I was immersed in the participants' stories and my journey. This was because I had shared my story first and invited them into my space. As I shared it repeatedly, I had the opportunity to make meaning of it, challenge my preconceptions of self, and create a new story. Nash (2004; 2019) states that the self emerges from the multiple telling of one's narrative.

As we engaged, there were moments where emotions took over, and we had moments of silence. In that silence, I felt vulnerable. I had always perceived vulnerability as a weakness. I now have a new story about it. "Vulnerability is the opposite of shame" (Hernández-Saca et al., 2020, p. 32). "It is the birthplace of love, belonging, joy, courage, empathy, and creativity" (Brown, 2012, p. 34). This is one of the reflective pieces I wrote after engaging with Ntozinhle and sharing my collage.

Figure 4.1 Journal entry one



These kinds of engagements, fine lines between the relationship between myself and the participants, bonded our engagements and enveloped me in the metaphoric parade. After this initial engagement, I moved from unconsciousness to consciousness, attending to and acknowledging the relationship between myself and the participants - a relationship of co-construction and relational inquiry. I maintained this throughout, and more so when I engaged in the data analysis. Clandinin (2019) avers that “to be a reader of a narrative is to be drawn into a story, to find a place or way of seeing through participating in the story” (p.101). I could see my part in the co-creation and construction and the reciprocity. I had to be within and at the periphery to ensure that the NPs’ stories and experiences were still mediated and accentuated in this relationship.

The participants also provided reflections. These are some reflections the novice principals shared in debriefing sessions at various phases.

I don’t think I could have shared what I shared with you if you had not shared your story. I also enjoyed and will continue to enjoy your WhatsApp statuses. Ave weyisa kodwa (you like teasing me). Before I post anything, I am thinking, what will she say today, ukungijova (to tease me)? (Mholi)

I really enjoyed doing the collage. You took me way back to my past, to parts of it I had forgotten. But most of all, it helped me with the present and future. To be honest with you,

I don't know what I was doing. I have just been doing it. I needed to pause. I now know what I am doing, why I am doing it, and what I should be doing. (Ntozinhle)

Ngizizwa sengathi ngehliswe umthwalo (I feel like a heavy load/burden has been removed). Lento kaMalumekazi iyislonda esingapholi (The wound left by my experience with my aunt (uMalumekazi) is like a sore that does not want to heal). When talking about her, I remember standing up to a colleague who was victimising a learner. At that point, I don't know why I had the courage or such a firm conviction to do such a thing. Now I think I understand why. (Maqhinga)

We came together with Maqhinga and others to speak freely about our experiences, share our fears, successes, and ups and downs in this journey, and help each other grow. I am glad you also gave me this opportunity. I have grown in understanding my practice and who I am by talking to you. We cannot even say our truths in the spaces we occupy because we are told asikazi lutho, sisafika, sisazobona, sisayigenge encane (we are still wet behind the ears, we are still new, we are yet to see the reality of leadership). (Ubuntu)

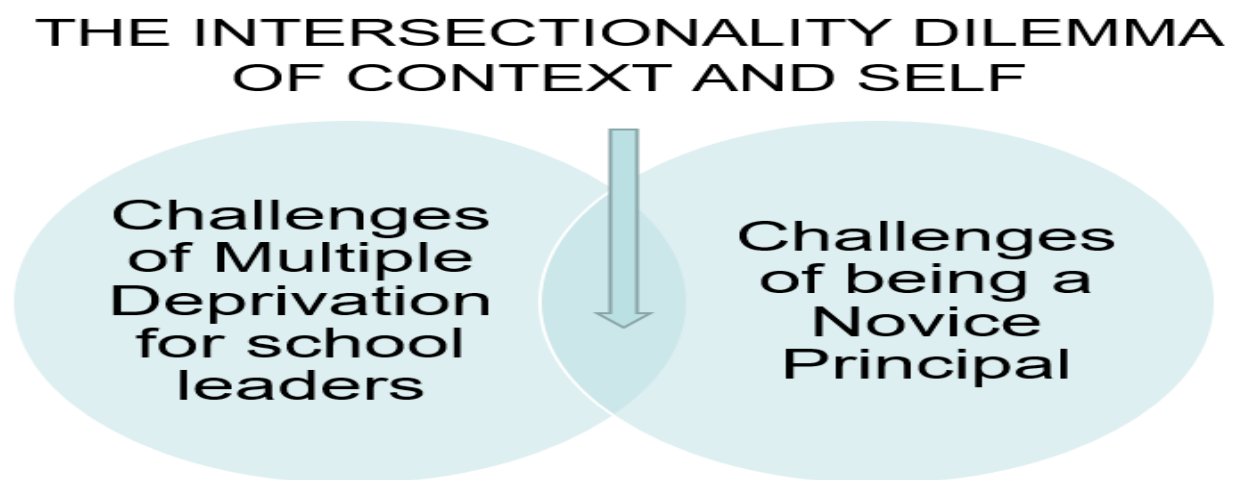
The second dimension in the metaphoric space seeks to address continuity and is referred to as temporality (Clandinin, 2006; 2013; 2019). The underlying premise here is that individuals are shaped by and are a product of their past, present, and anticipated future (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Experiences occur in a continuous temporal transition (Clandinin, & Connelly, 2000; Connelly & Clandinin, 2006).

To get a composite canvas of the storied lives of the NPs, I had to first look at who they are through their life histories, providing a broad gaze of their storied lives. From this wide gaze, I could look at facets past and present and how, at this point, they culminated into a composite story. The NPs also cast the net on their imagined futures, pausing and asking how the past and present experiences feed into this as they continue to live their storied lives.

The last dimension of the metaphoric space speaks to context. This dimension emphasizes contextual embeddedness, highlighting that events occur in particular places and spaces, influencing how and why they happen (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006). The situatedness of experience was significant in this study because I sought to understand how the NPs led schools in a deprived context and how being a novice influenced their leadership. It was also important because, as already alluded to, past experiences influence present actions, which also occur in particular spaces, shaping past, current, and future meanings, propelling shifts in current behaviours, and furthering temporality.

In retrospect, the “metaphoric space” has been an eye-opener for me. It has enabled me to consider and attend to who I am and becoming in the research puzzles (Caine et al., 2013). I started the journey with biases influenced by my experiences (see Chapter 1, pp. 8-9). These experiences situated my thinking into the larger cultural, social, familial, and institutional narratives (Caine et al., 2013), making me perceive the lived experiences of NPs from a mentality of victimhood and a deficit-based approach. In a conference presentation, I labelled this as the double dilemma.

Figure 4.2 The Intersectionality Dilemma



As I immersed myself in the metaphoric space, I started challenging the single narrative I had appropriated from my experience and literature. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie (2009) speaks about the danger of a single story. She states,

The single story creates stereotypes. It is not that stereotypes are untrue, but they are incomplete. They make one story become the only story.

My single story of novice principals leading schools in deprived contexts perpetuated the stereotype of individuals who are victims with limited capital to navigate the challenges they face. It was a story focused on what they did not have and could not do. This is the story I bought into. I am not saying that this story is untrue. I am saying this story is incomplete. There are other stories about them: stories of triumph, of working against the tide, and of navigating the terrain despite the rogue waves.

Caine et al. (2019) declare that within narrative research, “experience is viewed narratively and necessitates considerations of relational knowing and being, attention to the artistry of and within experience, and sensitivity to the overlapping stories that bring people together in research relationships” (p. 270). The more and more I immersed myself in the “metaphoric narrative inquiry space,” I continually asked myself these questions:

What am I learning? Who am I concerning what I am learning? Why am I learning this now? What meanings and understandings am I attaching to these learnings and the process in which it is happening?

I am becoming a reflexive and critical inquirer who has learned to respect the experiences of others and to look beyond my own biases, a person who embraces the notion of multiple truths and knowings. I will stay as close as possible to their experiences and am mindful that my representations must arise from shared experiences retold (Caine et al., 2013; Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007). My interpretations must come from and grow from “being-in-relation” with the participant (Caine et al., 2013, p. 580). It is an ethical obligation demanding respect for the centrality of relationships in the inquiry (Caine et al., 2013). Narrative inquiry was appropriate for this study because it provided the space layered knowing which can capture the complexity of human experience. It provided a space for reflexivity for the participants and me as I was also part of the metaphoric space. It captured the nuances of being a novice leading a school in a deprived context.

4.5 Choosing my Captains: Selection of Participants

I used two sampling methods to select the participants for this study. Firstly, I used purposive sampling. Also called judgement sampling, this is a non-random technique where participants are chosen on the basis that they are well-informed and have the necessary knowledge and experience about the phenomenon (Cohen et al., 2011; 2017; Creswell & Clark, 2011; Etikan & Bala, 2016). The parameters guiding my judgement and choice of Captains were that the principals had to have less than three years of experience in the principalship position. Additionally, their tenure in these years must have been in schools located in deprived contexts. Setting these parameters is vital in qualitative research because the emphasis is placed on distinct characteristics of the population and phenomenon (Cohen et al., 2011; 2017), as this can make or break the research (McLean & Campbell, 2003).

Snowballing was used as the second sampling technique. Snowballing is a process where participants are sought by using social networks as leads to access hard-to-reach or hidden populations (Etikan & Bala, 2017; Noy, 2008). It may also be explained as a sampling procedure when the researcher accesses participants through the contact information provided by other participants (Noy, 2008). Usually, these populations suffer from stigmas and marginalisation (Noy, 2008). However, occasionally they may be social elites who intentionally exclude themselves from the public (Moyser & Wagstaffe, 1987, Noy, 2008). I used this sampling technique in this study because I did not know the people who fit the parameters I described above.

I had one person in mind, Maqhinga. We already had a relationship. I had supervised him at the Honours level and had recently bumped into him, and he told me he had been promoted. On that day, we conversed about the socioeconomic challenges of the community in which his school was located. He also shared some of the difficulties he was experiencing, having moved from a top-performing, well-resourced school. He came to mind before I had defended my proposal and was purposively selected as one of the Captains. Unfortunately, it took me 15 months to begin with the data generation. Not all was lost, though, because 15 months later, he still had served for less than five years. When I met him, he referred me to Ubuntu, and just like that, the sampling evolved to snowballing.

After Maqhinga and Ubuntu, my leads dried up. I then conversed with my supervisor, who gave me Sipho's contact information. They had attended university together. When I met Sipho, the floodgates of participants opened. He was in a WhatsApp group with his University mates, some of whom had also recently been promoted. He referred me to Miss Nzama, Mholi, and Xolani. As demonstrated, snowballing served well because I could use it to access new participants when other avenues have dried up (Noy, 2008).

With six participants in hand, I started setting up the interviews. Months and months went by, and I could not get appointments with the participants. I was so frustrated. I remember making an appointment with one participant and driving for over three hours to meet him. When I got there, at the time, we had agreed that he was not at school. I was so annoyed. In all the frustration and fury, I remembered Mr. Zulu, my ex-classmate, recently promoted as Chief Education Specialist (CES), and I called him. Our conversation was as follows:

Mr. Zulu: Khanyo unjani (how are you)?

Kay: Ngigrand, ngidlala istudy nothisha omkhulu abangi crossayo (I'm good. I'm just being "played" by my study and principals who are dodging me). Unabo othisha omkhulu abasha kwi circuit yakho? (Do you have any new principals in your circuit?)

Mr. Zulu: Yeh, sure. I will get their numbers for you.

About three weeks passed, and I called him again to remind him. He gave me five leads. Amongst them were Miss Nzama and Ntozinhle. Of the five, three agreed to participate. With renewed energy, I started setting up appointments. I did experience stumbling blocks, but I soldiered on. I ended up with six participants in this study, guided by the methodology, but I report on four for reasons given below. According to Tagg (1985), smaller samples are recommended when engaging in narrative inquiry (Tagg, 1985). The reasoning is to fully and thoroughly explore their individual stories and gain in-depth insights into their experiences and the meanings they attach to them (Tagg, 1985). That being said, I acknowledge that the sample of four is still relatively small.

All six participants were interviewed. As will be later explained in the methodological reflections in Chapter eight, after the interviews, I found myself with a large data set. I had to choose whether to use all the stories or reduce the number of participants in the report. I chose the latter, reducing the stories in the report from six to four – a choice that still pains me today. Hence, I do not report the stories of Xolani and Miss Nzama in this dissertation. I chose these two participants because they were the last ones I interviewed, and I had engaged with their stories for a shorter period.

Regarding the phenomenon, I conducted a thorough prior assessment to ascertain whether the schools in which these principals led fit the descriptors of multiple deprivations, which include, among other things, inadequate resources and infrastructure, illiterate parent component and poverty, to mention but a few (Chikoko, 2017; Maringe & Moletsane, 2015). I profiled the schools to illustrate how deprivation was manifesting in the particular site (see Section 4.5.1). The profiling was necessary because when using the narrative inquiry methodology, "a rich description of the context needs to be the fore in all narrative inquiry accounts so that narrative reality in any local context- what does and doesn't get said, about what, how and why and to whom can be understood" (Chase, 2011, p.422).

4.5.1 Profiling of the Schools and the Captains

This section provides a profile of the participants and the schools they led. This is important as deprivation may exist in varying ways. Therefore, it is essential to illustrate its manifestation

in each school, to not strip the findings from the contexts in which they emerged (Bhengu & Myende, 2016). The data used for this profiling was generated from the life story grid, life story interviews, and transect walks. A transect walk is a systematic walkthrough of an area (Kanstrup et al., 2014). I engaged in these (with permission and without interference with teaching and learning activities) on several occasions when I visited the schools. I also took walks around the community to get a feel of the areas.

The schools had common features. All the schools are no-fee paying schools, between Quintile one and three. They benefit from the National School Nutrition Programme (NSNP). They are situated in a deprived context. Two principals (Ntozinhle and Mholi) are external appointments. This means they were promoted from other schools. The other two (Maqhinga and Ubuntu) are internal appointments, promoted to principalship within the same school where they served as DHs and APs. Below I profile each of the principals and illustrate the unique characteristics of each of the schools.

4.5.1.1 Captain Ntozinhle

Ntozinhle is an African female in her late forties. She is a nun. Her highest qualification is a Bachelor of Education Honours degree. She has 11 years of teaching experience at private schools and about two years of experience as a principal. Before her appointment, she had not previously served in any senior management position.

Ntozinhle leads a primary school, classified as quintile three. The school is situated in a deep rural area. The school is situated along a gravel road, making it challenging to access during heavy rains. The school has limited infrastructure and lacks floor space. As such, the classes are overcrowded. There is no library, sports field, and school hall. Learners have toilets, but they are insufficient for the number of students in the school, and they are dilapidated. Some no longer have flushing mechanisms. The general infrastructure is not conducive to teaching and learning, and I observed many broken doors, windows, and leaking roofs in the classrooms.

Unemployment is rife and economic opportunities are scarce in the area. The lack of such opportunities has resulted in the migration of the youth populous, the parents of the learners who attend Ntozinhle's school. For the most part, learners in Ntozinhle's school live with their grandparents. Ntozinhle also mentioned that the school has several learners who are orphans, and some live in child-headed homes. The grandparents are illiterate and rely on their pension and other grants to provide for their households, which sometimes comes up to about five or more individuals. Poverty is a norm within the community.

4.5.1.2 Captain Ubuntu

Ubuntu is an African male in his forties. He has a Higher Education Diploma and an Advanced Certificate in Education. For most of his teaching career of approximately 20 years, he has served in the same school where he climbed the ladder from a post-level one educator to a Departmental Head. He was subsequently promoted to principalship in 2018 before serving as an Acting Principal (AP) in 2017 in the same school.

The school that Ubuntu leads is situated in a peri-urban area. It is a secondary school serving approximately 400 learners with about 13 educators. It is classified as a quintile three school. Getting to the school is challenging because the route passes through a river that becomes flooded during heavy rains. Therefore, the school struggles with attracting learners, and as such, they accept any learner they can get. They attract learners from other areas who have failed or been expelled from their schools. The school is called “the scrapyard” because the learner population is regarded as “rejects.” The vast majority of the learner population also comes from a poor socioeconomic background.

As you enter the school, a faded sign greets you with the school’s name. The fence around the school is barely visible. Taking a walk around the school, I see that the school buildings require major renovations. The paint is worn off, and most classrooms have broken windows and doors. Entering the toilets, a heavy stench of urine fills the air. The school still has pit toilets, and there is no running water. They rely on a Jojo tank for the water supply. There is no laboratory, library, or sports field.

4.5.1.3 Captain Mholi

Mholi is an African male in his late thirties, born in a deep rural town in northern KwaZulu-Natal. He is married with three children. He has a Bachelor of Education Degree, a Diploma in Library Services, and an Honours degree in education. Before his appointment, he served as a post-level one teacher for about ten years. He is the principal of the same school he attended in his primary years and has served three years in his position.

Mholi’s school is in a deep rural area in Northern KwaZulu-Natal. It is a primary school. In our conversations, Mholi mentioned that his main challenge is with the infrastructure in the school. There is one primary school in the area. The classrooms they have are not enough, and there is overcrowding. In my walks, I noticed that the building are old to the extent that some have bricks that have come out of the walls. The toilets are dilapidated and not safe for young

learners. There is no sports field or library. Windows, doors, and some classroom furniture is also broken.

The learners come from a community that is affected by various socioeconomic challenges. He reports in a saddened voice that there are learners who are HIV-positive and orphaned. Some learners live with guardians who neglect them and come to school in a condition that brings tears to his eyes. As a measure to provide support and because of the distance learners have to travel, the Department has provided the school with buses, but Mholi says they are not enough. Learners are squashed like sardines; if an accident were to happen, it would be a disaster as the bus is overloaded. He estimates they need about three additional buses because even with the overloading, one of the buses has to take two loads. For the learners on the second bus, it means they arrive at school late.

4.5.1.4 Captain Maqhing

Maqhing is in his late thirties and has been a principal for about two years. He has climbed the ranks from a post-level one educator to Departmental Head and has also served as an Acting Principal. His highest qualification is an Honours degree in education. He is married with three children.

The school he serves is located in a peri-urban area within a small settlement. It is a secondary school with a staff of about ten educators and approximately 400 learners. The school is a no-fee paying school. Aesthetically, the school is not soft on the eye. The paint is faded, and the classrooms have broken windows and doors. It is also poorly resourced, lacking basics like running water. The school also has pit toilets without a library, sports field, laboratory, and drama studio.

Accessibility is an issue with transport being available at set times. The bus arrives at 8:00 in the morning and departs at 14:30. Therefore, the school must operate within those hours. As a result, the school takes any learner it can get to maintain enrolment numbers. Learners come from a community where unemployment is rife and community protests are common. There has been an instance where these resulted in school closure for over two weeks.

4.6 Field Texts Generation Methods: “The Life Story”

In narrative work, data is called field texts (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Clandinin, 2006). I used life history interviews (LHI) to generate the field texts for this study. Life history interviews are sometimes called narrative interviews or conversations (Jovchelovitch & Bauer,

2000, McCormack, 2004). Unlike ordinary interviews, these interviews use everyday communication, namely storytelling, and listening, to gain insight into the participant's lived experiences (Jovchelovitch & Bauer, 2000).

Andrew (2007) tells us that stories are one of the primary ways we may compose a canvas of ourselves. "We become who we are through telling stories about our lives and lining the stories we tell" (Andrew, 2007, p. 78). Stories can serve as a bridge or a gateway between the lived experiences of individuals and the social realities that shape their lives (Bell, 2000). Therefore, we can best understand our past experiences through stories retold at a particular time. These understandings can serve as a means to help shape our future experiences.

In this study, it was necessary to understand the intersectional space between lived experience and social reality and how it shapes human life. Caine et al. (2013) refer to this space of intersection as "in-between spaces," offering a sacred opportunity where opportunities for new ways of knowing and understanding emerge. An area of evolution and profound change, an intersection of uncertainty where the question of "who and not what we are" is negotiated (Caine et al., 2013, p 580).

Life history interviews are also rich in indexical statements (Jovchelovitch & Bauer, 2000). In these interviews, "a context is given; the events are sequential and end at a particular point; and there is an evaluation of the outcome" of the particular action (Jovchelovitch & Bauer, 2000, p. 1). Before fieldwork, I naively anticipated that the conversations would follow this order, neatly and chronologically packaged. However, I soon realised that life is messy, and so are the stories. Tagg (1985) states that when using LHI, the events, stories, and incidents are seldom remembered and articulated in the order of occurrence. The actual facets of an account further add to the complexity. Stories may have an interrelated sequence of events and, at times, multiple stories and consequences that emanate from an event (Tagg, 1985). So there can be a story within a story making another story. Similarly, Sikes and Everington (2001) state that lives are not neatly packaged, and things that happen in other areas of one's life have implications and repercussions on other aspects.

In this study, the stories told mediated experiences through the significant events in the NP's social contexts (Jovchelovitch & Bauer, 2000). However, the sequence was spontaneous and unfolded in a naturalistic manner. The narration revealed a reconstruction of place, time, motivations, and the actor's symbolic system of orientations (Jovchelovitch & Bauer, 2000). Therefore, the generated field texts did not lie solely in the events but moved to another level

where NPs made sense of those events (France, 2010). In this meaning-making, they gave accounts of how they have been influenced and shaped by the events they had experienced (France, 2010). Life history interviews acknowledge the relationship between individuals and their historical and social circumstances; in this, people can make meaning of themselves and their social world (Sikes & Everington, 2001).

As a result, when the NPs narrated their stories, their subjective meanings were revealed, and a sense of self and identity was negotiated as those stories unfolded (Etherington, 2004). This was particularly valuable for this study because it served as a means to give understanding and explanations for how NPs enacted leadership in the context in which they lead. It is important to note that stories are the reconstructions of experiences, remembered and now told at a particular time to a particular person for a specific purpose (Bruner, 1990; Etherington, 2004). This, therefore, affects which stories are told, how they are told, and consequently, how they are analysed (Etherington, 2004). Thus, central to life history interviews is the understanding and acknowledgment that stories are co-constructed and negotiated between the researcher and the participants (Etherington, 2004). But the integrity of the story lies in the participant being in control of their plot and their discourse being dominant in the narrative (Tagg, 1985).

Another important characteristic of life history interviews is that they provide a platform for narrative knowing. Narrative knowledge or knowing is the product of stories created and constructed and the meanings that emanate from them (Etherington, 2004). It helps make sense of the complexity and ambiguity in human existence (Etherington, 2004). Moreover, narrative knowledge helps shape the story and organise information about how the events the participants have experienced have been interpreted, the values and beliefs that have guided those interpretations, and the projected hopes, intentions, and anticipated futures (Etherington, 2004).

4.6.1 The Approach for Field Text Generation

I used Jovchelovitch and Bauer's (2000) five primary phases as a framework to facilitate the life history interviews. The phases are preparation, initiation, main narration, questioning, and concluding talks (Jovchelovitch & Bauer, 2000). In their work, these scholars discuss these phases in the context of one interview. In this study, these phases were used over time. This section will discuss these and the activities I engaged in during each phase.

4.6.1.1 The Preparation Phase

According to Jovchelovitch and Bauer (2000), the preparation phase entails exploring the field. This is a broad descriptor, open to various interpretations. I explored the field by building

rapport and using triggers. Triggers are mechanisms to assist and encourage autobiographical remembering so that the depth of the stories shared is enhanced (Clandinin, 2013; Van Schalkwyk, 2010). Life story grids and collages were the two triggers used in this study.

The first trigger used was a life story grid. This involved collecting biographical information from the participants (Tagg, 1985). I first drafted and completed my life story grid. While doing this, I gained insights into the process and followed the following approach when I did the one for the NPs. The life story grid did not follow the pattern of having a row for each year of the NP's life. Instead, it provided space for the insertion of biographical information and information relating to occupational, educational, and family history (Tagg, 1985). To make the task less laborious and to ensure that the NPs provided reliable information, this was a joint task between myself and the participant (Perlman, 1974 in Tagg, 1985). As shown below, at times, it was spontaneous, and I had to embrace these moments. I had been communicating with Miss Nzama telephonically for a while, but she was always busy when I asked for an appointment to see her and explain my study. One day I remember I was in Room 32, and she called.

Miss Nzama: "Hi Nokukhanya. Sorry I've just been a bit busy. So what is your research about?"

I explained my study briefly and what it would entail and then asked for an appointment to explain further. After my explanation, Miss Nzama proceeded with her impromptu life story grid. I was standing outside Student Union with no pen, but I went with the flow.

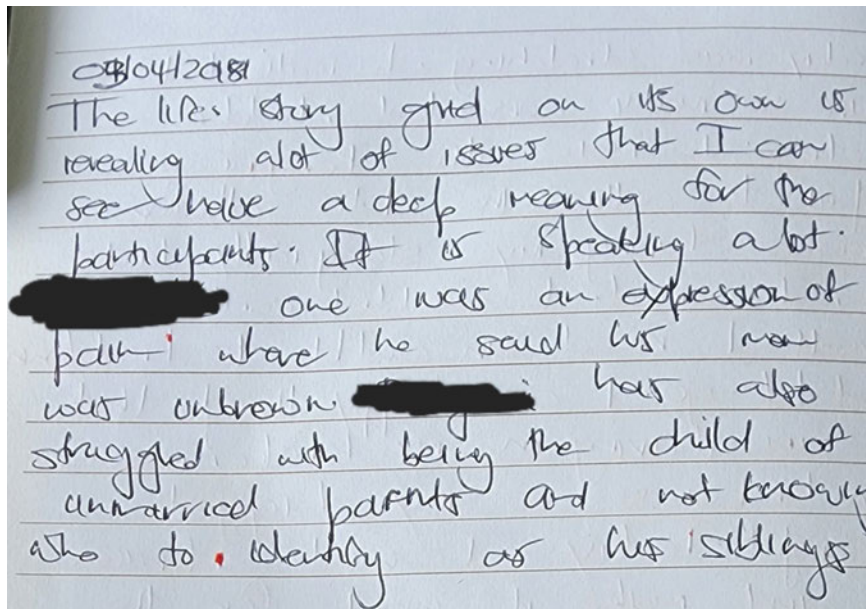
Miss Nzama: "*Eyi, Nokukhanya,*" she said as she took a deep breath and sighed heavily.

After the roller coaster I had, I started writing a biography about my life, but it is still on hold. This research you are doing will help me get back to it. You know, before I was appointed, I was acting, yhoohoo, it showed me flames, I tell you. I moved to that position after being appointed as a DH. I still had not even found my feet as a DH.

The conversation continued, and from this initial interaction, rich data emerged. I remember running back to write down all she had shared so I would have it on hand when we met. It took me about a month from this initial conversation to secure an interview, but we were engaging via Whatsapp. She was rather impressed that I remembered what we had initially discussed when I brought it up in our first meeting.

Though used as a trigger, the life story grid also started to paint the canvas of the storied lives of novice principals. It was also invaluable for building rapport with the principals. Below is a reflection on some of the engagements.

Figure 4.3 Journal entry two



Collage inquiry was the other technique used as a trigger in this study. According to Butler-Kisber (2008), collage inquiry may be used in three fundamental ways. It may be a tool for a reflective process, a form of elicitation, or a way of conceptualizing ideas (Butler-Kisber, 2008). For this study, the collage was used as a trigger to elicit and conceptualize the participant's life story.

As a form of elicitation, collage inquiry is a valuable portal of scaffolding memory (van Schalkwyk, 2010) because, through collage-making, a platform for visual listening is established and created (Neilsen, 2002). More so, for purposes of elicitation, collage inquiry gives entry into liminal spaces that reveal unconscious connections and new understandings (Davis, 2008a; Neilsen, 2002). It is in this place of liminality where special attention is given to contexts and relationships and time to ensure that an in-depth exploration is achieved (Caine et al., 2013). These revelations were significant in this study because it was necessary to understand how the NPs' past and present experiences influence their leadership repertoire and practise. There was also the endeavour of explaining causality that would give insights into why they enacted leadership in the way they did and how the context in which this leadership was enacted influenced their practices.

Regarding conceptualizing ideas, collage inquiry can flesh out different aspects of a phenomenon so that even the grey, silent and hidden meanings begin to surface (Butler-Kisber & Podma, 2011). The approach of supplementing the life history interviews with collaging as a trigger was thus aimed at encouraging the NPs to think out of the box and to allow access to different parts of their consciousness (Mason, 2006; Prosser & Loxley, 2008). It was also a means to illustrate the categories explained below.

Before engaging with the participants, I had done my collage. I used my life story grid as a tool to inform my collage. I looked at the episodes and drew out significant events. Significant events were divided into three categories: key scenes in the life story, personal ideology, and challenges (McAdams, 2008). Each category was further sub-divided as follows:

Key scenes in the life story: high points, low points; turning points; a positive childhood memory; a negative childhood memory; a vivid adult memory; a wisdom event; a religious, spiritual, or mystical experience.

Personal ideology: religious/ethical values; political/social values; change, development of religious and political views; single value; other.

Challenges: life challenges; health; loss; failure/regret.

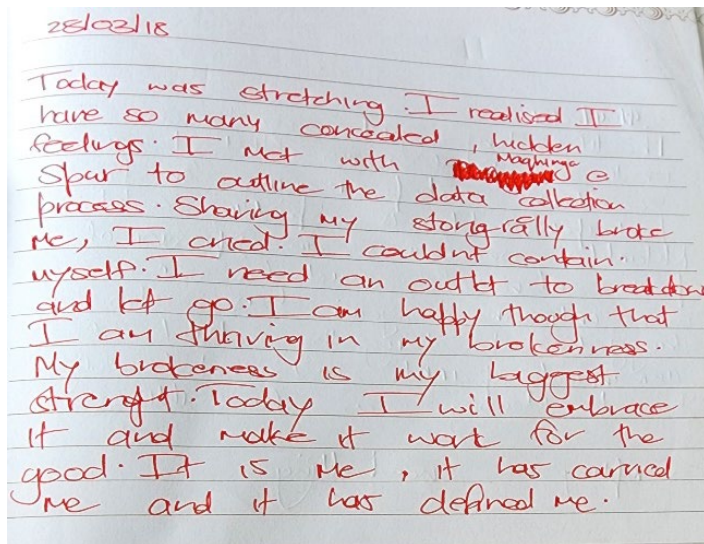
The intention was not to have some rigid structure that would have to be followed but rather to guide the NPs and me on the events that could be considered significant. From there, I constructed my collage. I used a calendar page instead of a blank sheet which signified a loss of time that I had experienced in my life, as explained in Chapter one. This was still in line with the conventions of collage inquiry as their main characteristic rests on the principle of visual representation (van Schalkwyk, 2010). I pasted different pictures that signified the significant events in my life and told a story of who I was and what had shaped me into the person I perceived myself to be (van Schalkwyk, 2010). I tried to use pictures that stood out from each other (van Schalkwyk, 2010). Not all the sub-categories listed above were featured, but I drew from those I felt best told my story.

While creating my collage, I also found the process exhibiting the element of being reflexive (Butler-Kisber, 2008). I had to think about the positioning of each picture, its significance, and whether or not it was as important and influential as I had initially thought it was. There were times when I was stuck and looked at what I had done and did not see me but saw who I wanted

to be perceived as. I felt like a fraud. I started again until I created a visual that was true to my experiences.

I then used the collage as a reference tool to narrate my life story to the NPs. This was done in on a one-on-one basis. My first meeting was with Maqhinga. I was relieved that he would be the “guinea” pig because I knew him already. During supervision meetings, we shared stories about our lives, so I felt confident. So there I was, equipped with my laminated collage, on the way to Spur. I must say, using a new data generation tool is quite intimidating. We arrived and had lunch and a chat before I started using my collage to narrate my own story. How that unfolded is detailed in the journal entry below.

Figure 4.4 Journal entry three



I felt so drained after this session. But I also felt less burdened, like a load had been lifted off my shoulders. I went back to work. As I walked to the “Sandton” Wing (Ellen Khuzwayo Building), Prof Msibi came up behind me. I knew I would get the question, “How is your study going?” Too late, he caught up with me, and as it were, my big mouth deceived me. I told him what had just happened, and he gave me some good, sound advice. I felt much better and less lame after our conversation.

After this engagement, I took a break from the fieldwork. I needed to take ownership of my story. When I returned to the field, I would narrate my story using the collage as a guide, and after my narration, I provided a platform for interaction and engagement. The more I told my story, the more I owned it. My understanding of my journey deepened every time I retold and relived my story (Caine et al., 2013). It was therapeutic. I was healing from wounds I had buried and wounds I didn’t even know I carried with me. I felt it was also crucial for the participants

to have access to my life story, as this would create mutual trust. The participants were also my therapists. As I shared my stories, they comforted me. They listened, and that was what I needed.

At the time, I had a fear and an ethical conundrum about what was happening. How would I deal with that situation concerning the participants if I had felt so bruised and experienced so much conflict and pain in retelling and reliving my own story? I was mindful of the ethical obligations of the relationship and that the experience of retelling and reliving might call forth discomfort and/or shift attention in unsettling ways (Neumann, 1997). This awareness aided me, and I communicated my feeling to the participants, stating they should reach out if they needed additional support.

I then explained the process of collage-making to them and provided them with materials so they could create their collage. The participants sent me their pictures, and I printed them in colour and returned it to them. This was another opportunity for engagement and building further rapport.

4.6.1.2 The Initiation, Narration, and Questioning Phases

The initiation, narration, and questioning phases were intertwined in this study. The participants started the narration using the collage as a reference guide and tool to share their stories (Jovchelovitch & Bauer, 2000). When the narration began, I actively listened and took caution not to interrupt the flow of the narration (Jovchelovitch & Bauer, 2000). I only offered non-verbal encouragement as the story was being told (Jovchelovitch & Bauer, 2000). I was non-evaluative and reflective throughout the process while I jotted down notes for questioning (Bodgan & Taylor, 1975; Jovchelovitch & Bauer, 2000). I waited until a clear coda signalled that the participant was done with their story (Jovchelovitch & Bauer, 2000).

I did not wait until the whole story was exhausted, but I was guided by the references to the pictures the participant used while narrating their story. After each coda, I began questioning that particular plot, engaging in the questioning phase. I took caution not to ask “why” questions as these invite justifications and rationalizations (Jovchelovitch & Bauer, 2000). I asked for clarity on the events mentioned in the story. I was cautious not to cross-examine the participant or point out any contradictions in the narrative that I may have picked up (Jovchelovitch & Bauer, 2000). This process was repeated multiple times until the participants had fully exhausted their pictures and stated that they were done.

4.6.1.3 Concluding Talks

Concluding talks are “informal” and happen once the recording has been stopped (Jovchelovitch & Bauer, 2000). At this stage, “why” questions can be asked (Jovchelovitch & Bauer, 2000). At this phase, I ensured that I noted all the issues raised as I felt that the participants seemed more relaxed and shared other valuable insights. It was a free-flowing conversation, where I also shared my experiences and asked the “why” questions I had previously avoided. The concluding talk served as a rich reference, and the issues we discussed were used as a kind of start-up for the subsequent interview (Jovchelovitch & Bauer, 2000). During this process, I exercised reflexivity. This involved being embedded in the moment of the conversation while simultaneously reflecting on what had been said and what I further anticipated (Etherington, 2004).

4.6.1.4 The Process Overview

All interviews were conducted as outlined in the steps above until the participants exhausted any stories they wanted to share. Each interview was scheduled for approximately 90 minutes; however, participants were free to talk until they were finished. The in-depth nature of the life history interviews warranted that I have multiple engagements with the NPs (Kumar, 2005). I had initially set up five interviews per participant; however, we extended the sessions where necessary. The interviews were administered one-on-one to allow the participants to speak freely, honestly, and comfortably share their stories. The interviews were conducted at the participants’ convenience regarding time and venue after having set up an appointment and providing them with the information sheet and a summary of what was expected from them. The process was emergent rather than tightly prefigured and rigid (Creswell & Poth, 2016). I was guided by the plan but was flexible to changes and shifts during the various stages (Creswell & Poth, 2016).

Due to time constraints, after the initial five scheduled interviews, some follow-ups were done via WhatsApp. Once I had done the transcription and realised some points were unclear, I would send a voice note, and the participant would respond using the same medium. This was a valuable tool as it ensured continuity in the advancement of plots and further collaboration. The nature of LHI and NI worked well because both are embedded in such collaborations, mutual storytelling, and restoring as the research proceeds (Clandinin & Connelly, 1990). Both emphasize the joint construction of the research relationship (Clandinin & Connelly, 1990).

Using both verbal and non-verbal modes of expression allowed the NPs to engage with their world and experiences, thus providing detailed descriptions concerning the multiple voices of

the social and private self that is continuously expressed at each level of one's consciousness (van Schalkwyk, 2010). In turn, this results in a rich narrative. "The richness of the narrative helps us to understand how they understand themselves, their strategies for living, and how they make theoretical sense of their lives" (Etherington, 2004, p. 31). The data generation method was suitable because this study focused on gaining in-depth insight into the lived experiences of the NPs; how these lived experiences have shaped their identities; how and why they lead in the way they do, and how the context in which they lead influenced their leadership practices.

I believe my investment in building rapport was one of the ways that helped me to be able to deal with the issue mentioned above. For all the participants, the first meeting happened when there was a sense of familiarity. There were times when I went to meet them, and the District had called them urgently for an appointment. I would check up on them in the evening and chat about what had transpired. My approach of making them part of the research and embracing them as co-researchers made them feel at ease. After an in-depth interview, Umholi sent me the following message via Whatsapp:

Thank you for giving me a chance to share my story. I didn't realise how much I had bottled up inside. Umuntu uthwele engaboni (we are carrying such a heavy load unconsciously). I feel much lighter now. I feel relieved that I now know I am still wounded. I can now start healing.

4.7 Data Analysis: Storying and Restorying

In qualitative research, the analysis of field texts is an iterative process that occurs concurrently with data generation (Di-Cicco Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). Field texts were analysed using two methods. There was a narrative analysis and, subsequently, an analysis of narratives. These two types of analysis involve making a story from the field texts and consequently analysing the story for common themes (Polkinghorne, 1995).

Narrative analysis is a data synthesis process involving organizing the different field texts into a coherent narrative account or story (Polkinghorne, 1995). This is also called restorying (Creswell et al., 2007). The stories generated from the life history interviews and Whatsapp conversations, triggered by the life story grid and collage, were analysed. Coherent stories were created through narrative configuration, which chronologically connects events and actions to advance a plot (Polkinghorne, 1995).

Plots are important sub-headings that build the story and display a linkage among the data elements (Polkinghorne, 1995). In this study, these were informed by the collage pictures. Through narrative analysis, a portrait of lived experience is formed as the researcher pays attention to how the participants arrange and make sense of them (Check & Schutt, 2012; Denzin & Lincoln, 2002).

The narrative analysis must not be mistaken for a simplistic configuration of stories. The researcher needs to establish and select a bounded system for the study so that the data extracted relates to the particular system under study (Polkinghorne, 1995). The experiences that formed the bounded system for this study were those which were able to provide an understanding of the NP's idiosyncrasies and create an explanation of who they were before and during their tenure, how and why they enacted leadership the way they did, and how the context influenced how they led. It was essential to establish this, as not all data elements were necessary for the particular study (Polkinghorne, 1995).

The initial stage of the narrative analysis looked at each episode of the NPs' lives, and from these episodes, significant and relevant events were extracted. This extraction was guided by utilising various plots as organizing templates (Polkinghorne, 1995). In each episode, the plots that guided this process were "tragic," "comedy," and "chance but significant" events (Polkinghorne, 1995). Tragic highlighted those experiences in which the participant fell short of achieving a particular objective, and comedy looked into experiences where a specific end or objective was achieved (Polkinghorne, 1995). Chance but significant events were those chance happenings that were valuable contributors but were not attached to a particular goal or outcome (Polkinghorne, 1995). The analysis looked at how each of the events, tragic or comedy or chance but significant, shaped the NPs' identity, shaped how they enacted leadership and consequently shaped how they responded to their challenges.

There was a constant question of "how did this happen? Why did this story come about? What is the meaning within this story? who are the actors? Where is the context?" (Bleakley, 2005; Polkinghorne, 1995). The process called for constant reflection and attentiveness. In parts where I was unsure, I went back to the participant and asked for clarity on the particular event. After the storylines from the organizing templates (collage pictures) emerged, the plot began to take shape in each episode. "As these plots started to take form, the events and happenings crucial to the story's denouement began to take shape" (Polkinghorne, 1995, p, 16).

I then reverted to the research puzzles to do narrative smoothing, which involved removing elements that were not pertinent to the study and held no significance (Polkinghorne, 1995). This was a to-and-fro process from the field texts to the emerging plot (Polkinghorne, 1995). The process outlined above was able “to relate events and actions to one another” and thus produce a story of the novice principal’s lived experiences (Polkinghorne, 1995, p. 18). It was essential to create the stories while preserving the integrity of the original story (Etherington, 2004).

The analysis of narratives was the second level of analysis. This involved thoroughly analysing the stories from which themes were derived based on the common elements embedded within them (Polkinghorne, 1995). The identification of themes was foregrounded on the entire database of stories acquired and was part of the earlier identified bounded system (Polkinghorne, 1995). It was an inductive process where the themes emerged from the stories instead of being informed by pre-set theoretical constructions (Polkinghorne, 1995). Simply put, the analysis of narratives moved from stories to identifying similar and common elements and further identified relationships among the elements (Polkinghorne, 1995).

This stage was conducted by thoroughly reading the stories, and from there, I began the process of coding. Coding involved breaking the data into smaller units and then reintegrating the units so that I could identify similarities, differences, and hidden meanings inherent in the stories (Cohen et al., 2011). I utilised two types of coding. The first was open coding which was the initial phase. Here the data was broadly categorised in terms of meanings, actions, circumstances, and events (Cohen et al., 2011). From the main categories sub-categories were identified. The next phase involved identifying the relationships between the categories and sub-categories. Through this axial coding, I could identify the relationships and interrelationships between the categories and sub-categories (Cohen et al., 2011). By employing this paradigmatic approach, this level of analysis examined the epiphanies and metaphors inherent in the stories (Savin-Baden & Van Niekerk, 2007).

Throughout this process, there was a constant comparison, with some categories being expanded while others were compressed and others were removed. This reiterative process required attentiveness so that the “deeply hidden assumptions could surface” (Bell, 2002, p. 209). By engaging in this dual analysis process, thick descriptions were produced, which in turn were able to thoroughly give insight into the lived experiences of novice principals who lead schools in a deprived context.

4.8 Ensuring Trustworthiness

For a study to be rendered worthy and seen as contributing to the development of knowledge, the study needs to conform to some forms of “widely” acceptable quality guidelines (Elliot, Fisher & Rennie, 1999; Dunleavy, 2003, Loh, 2013). While Lincoln and Guba’s (1985) works have been widely used to measure trustworthiness in qualitative research, criteria for narrative inquiry are still under development (Blumenfeld-Jones, 1995; Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). Presently researchers engaged in narrative inquiry recognise apparency, verisimilitude, and transferability as possible criteria (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). I adopted these in this study and further adopted fidelity as an additional criterion (Blumenfeld-Jones, 1995).

4.8.1 Apparency

Apparency is similar to credibility. It addresses the presented narrative’s plausibility (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). “A plausible accountable tends to ring true, one where the reader can say “I can see that happening” (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p. 8). Therefore, apparency relies on how the reader interprets and makes sense of the story; and how the story substantially recognizes and is authentic to the participant’s life (France, 2010).

Apparency was achieved by generating thick, rich field texts. These were developed through collaboration. Collaboration is about involving the participants in the study (Creswell & Miller, 2000) and acknowledging the entanglement of the metaphoric space. Such involvement results in the generation of credible field texts (Creswell & Miller, 2000). Developing rapport is essential to establish a relationship of trust for such collaboration. In this study, I invested heavily in this. While it was a methodological requirement, there was also an organic component where the relationship between me and the participants grew through spontaneous engagements. Because of this established rapport, participants freely shared their stories, and from this thick, rich field, texts were generated.

Moreover, because of the explanatory nature and in-depth engagement needed to solicit the stories, Roulston (2010) suggests multiple engagements are needed with the participants to gain a holistic account of one’s experiences. Because a rapport was already established with the participants, I could request multiple formal and informal engagements so they could be immersed in the study and dig deeper when sharing their stories. The various engagements were essential because narrative inquiry focuses on how people make sense and give meaning to accounts rather than the accounts themselves (France, 2010). Using the life story grid and

the collage inquiry, which served as triggers, also gave the participants ownership of what parts of their story they could share and what parts they felt were significant.

Furthermore, narrative inquiry emphasizes relational engagement between the researcher and the participants (Clandinin & Caine, 2008). This is because understanding life stories requires a certain level of attentiveness and wakefulness within the relationships we enter (Clandinin & Caine, 2008). I ensured that the participants saw themselves as co-researchers by thoroughly explaining the study and its potential benefit for them and the community of practice at large. Sharing the collage and my story was also a powerful mechanism of relationship building. At times, I felt I had lost control, but it is here where my vulnerability was exposed, and my truth expressed, inviting the participants to let go, relive, and tap into the depth of their lives, thus producing a detailed narrative. As I shared my own story, I was unafraid to share the benefit this sharing had provided me for my healing. I believe this openness and honesty made the participants see that tapping into their stories gives them insights and powerful space for introspection and growth. The use of collage inquiry also ensured that thick narratives were produced. The WhatsApp conversations further enhanced the depth of the stories that were created.

4.8.2 Verisimilitude

This criterion similarly deals with the narrative account's authenticity (Loh, 2013). A well-executed narrative account acts as a portal for readers to have a second-hand experience of the phenomenon being experienced and to empathize with the participant's situations and the decisions that emanate from them (Loh, 2013). When verisimilitude is achieved, the study has believability and seems true to its audience (Loh, 2013). The audience can "experience a congruence with their own experiences of similar, parallel, or analogous situations" (Blumenfeld-Jones, 1995, p. 31). It is important to re-emphasize that when people tell their stories, they do this for a particular purpose, situation, and audience (Sikes & Everington, 2001). These factors influence the telling, the representation of self, and the experience chosen (Sikes & Everington, 2001). While this may be seen as a challenge in providing an authentic account, these scholars state that telling one story is a sacred opportunity because through this one crafts a narrative that links events, experiences, and perceptions, and this canvas creates one's identity.

Member checking is one of the techniques used in this study to strengthen verisimilitude. Member checking entails taking field texts that have been analysed back to the participants so

they can have an opportunity to validate the interpretations, provide a context where needed, or offer alternate interpretations if needed (Patton, 2002; Creswell, 2009). This process also gave power to the participants over their narratives and how they had been interpreted (Bruce, 2008). In this input, their value was also affirmed, and another opportunity for the co-construction and development of their story was presented (Bruce, 2008; Linde, 1993).

Furthermore, the NP's stories were presented verbatim in the research report. Providing the reader with the "raw" data allows them to make their own judgments and interpretations. In this, verisimilitude is enhanced through the reader's perspective, who can read the narrative account and, through it, is taken into the context or event (Creswell & Miller, 2000).

In addition to member checking, peer debriefing was utilized. This process entailed finding peer reviewers familiar with the field. My critical friends, Vusi and Nosipho, served as my peer reviewers. They served as a support resource by providing support and playing the devil's advocate in terms of challenging my assumptions, pushing me in terms of my methodological decisions, and asking hard questions about the interpretations and methods used in the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1986). I leaned on them throughout the study to avoid biases.

4.8.3 Fidelity

This criterion is also closely related to the two that have already been presented. It speaks to issues of truth and, specifically, the relationship between the participants and the researcher (Blumenfeld-Jones, 1995). The questions being asked here are, "how true have the participants been in telling their story, in re-constructing their narrative? How true and honest has the researcher been in preserving the originality of the narrative they were told?" (Blumenfeld-Jones, 1995).

Relating to the first question, I thrived on fulfilling fidelity by building rapport with the participants. I invested heavily in establishing a relationship of trust before engaging with the data generation process. Sharing my story also strengthened the relationship because I first invited them into my life, honestly and authentically. Our communication with the novice principals happened informally and formally over a long period. We continued to share our stories and converse on other issues in the informal discussions. These spaces became liminal spaces where I could probe further, validating the authenticity of the narratives.

Using triggers also aided the principals in remembering. Collage making was significant in this regard. Though used as a trigger in this study, collage is a reflective process (Butler-Kisber & Poldma, 2009). In this way, while engaging with collage making, an individual pauses and

reflects on their thoughts and meanings of the representations of these thoughts. In this process, new possibilities and interpretations arise, bringing forth new meanings and understandings. These benefits were also reproduced in this study, positively impacting the coherence of the narratives told and enhancing their fidelity.

The process of member checking outlined in the previous section also ensured that fidelity was achieved concerning whether I had preserved the narrative's originality. I also ensured that I selected salient data when reporting the findings (Blumenfeld-Jones, 1995). Salient data best represents and speaks richly to the situation (Blumenfeld-Jones, 1995). I also reported the voices of the participants verbatim. Caution was taken during the narrative analysis that in presenting the field texts into a story, the actual words spoken by the participants were unaltered. I retained the original language in places where I felt translation to English would lose meaning. I also ensured that all processes used to generate field texts were thoroughly described to show how the stories were shaped and co-constructed (Etherington, 2004). Lastly, I used a reflexive journal to document my feelings and challenges presented in the report.

4.8.4 Transferability

Lastly, this study sought to fulfil the criterion of transferability. This seeks to ascertain the extent to which the study's findings can be applied to others in similar situations and contexts (Shenton, 2004). In narrative research, this is known as utility (Loh, 2013). Utility seeks to establish whether the findings will be relevant or valuable to others in a similar space, whether for research or practice (Loh, 2013). Nash (2004) reports that Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest that it is not the researcher's responsibility to provide a guide for transferability. It is, however, important that the researcher provides an adequate database to allow transferability judgments to be made by others (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This criterion was upheld by supplying a thick description through profiling who the participants were and the contexts in which they led.

4.9 Ethical Issues

Given that narrative inquiry is a relational methodology, the issue of ethics is paramount throughout the inquiry, warranting that much care is taken in the relationship between the researcher and the participants (Clandinin & Caine, 2008; Caine et al., 2013). Because I used the participant's life stories as my data source, it was imperative to ensure confidentiality and anonymity were thoroughly addressed. When someone shares their life story with you, you are privy to sensitive and confidential information. You, therefore, need to reciprocate that by being a confidante and a guardian of the information you have been privileged to hear

(Faulkner, 2015). As the participants shared their life stories, they mentioned other people who had not consented to be part of this study. The readers must not be able to identify the participants based on the given information regarding people, places, and events (Cohen et al., 2011). To ensure no such connections can be made, I provided pseudonyms, altered personal details, and other information such as where they grew up, worked and lived, and so on (Faulkner, 2015).

Caution was also taken regarding negotiations of entry and exit (Clandinin & Caine, 2008). I requested permission to conduct the study by applying for ethical clearance from the University of KwaZulu-Natal College of Humanities Ethics Committee. I also applied for permission from the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education to conduct school research, as they are the gatekeepers of the institutions these principals serve. Regarding the participants, they were first informally approached before a formal request was made. I paid particular interest to give a sense of ownership and equality between myself and the participant. I further obtained informed consent from the participants. Such consent involves providing the participants with all the necessary information about the study. This is important because in narrative research attending to participation shapes the participants' lives (Clandinin & Caine, 2008). They were also informed that they may withdraw from the study at any stage if they no longer wished to participate

It was also crucial that the participants were not exposed to harm (Rule & John, 2011). To the best of my ability, I strived to ensure that the participants were not exposed to any questions that might be diminishing, shameful, embarrassing, or intrusive. I also asked the participants if they felt they needed any support, having shared stories that may evoke pain and other emotions they could not cope with. All the participants shared that while some of what was shared reopened wounds, they needed an outlet to face these wounds so they could heal. Other ethical concerns included respect, mutuality, openness to multiple voices, giving the storyteller control over their narrative, tolerance of ambiguity, and valuing signs, symbols, and metaphors (Clandinin, 2006; Etherington, 2004). These concerns were upheld by providing the participant's multiple opportunities to engage with their restoried narratives and ensuring that their stories are retold and presented in this report.

4.10 Chapter Conclusion

This chapter presented the research design and methodology, the ways of knowing, highlighting the research processes and procedures used to generate data to respond to the research puzzles. The first section details the paradigm adopted in this study. Firstly I explained

the paradigm and then justified its appropriateness for inquiry through its ontological, epistemological, and methodological assumptions. The qualitative research design enveloping this study was then discussed. Following this was a discussion of the narrative inquiry methodology. In this section, I also used the participants' voices and journal entries to describe the reflexive process I was immersed in as I partook in the three-dimensional relational space. The data generation plan was then addressed. I began by explaining and describing the triggers used in this study. This was followed by a detailed description of life history interviews, the data generation method used in this study. In this section, I also detailed the process of generating the field texts through the different phases. The sampling methods, purposive and snowballing, used to select the Captains were then discussed. In discussing snowballing, I demonstrated the linkage of how the Captains were identified in the snowball. The Captains and their respective schools were also profiled in this section. The discussion of the dual analysis of field texts through narrative analysis and the subsequent analysis of narratives followed. Lastly, the chapter covered trustworthiness and the ethical considerations observed throughout the process. The following chapter presents the storied narratives created through the narrative analysis.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE CAPTAINS JOURNEY TO AND ON THE BRIDGE

“To tell stories is to be able to inhabit bodies that are not yours.”

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie

5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the restoried narratives created through the narrative analysis. The narratives respond to research puzzle one, “*Who are novice principals leading schools in the context of deprivation?*”? The narrative accounts were generated through life history interviews using life story grids and collage inquiry as triggers for remembering. In the presented restoried narratives, the collage images have been deconstructed and aligned to the plot they are advancing. The full collages are in the appendices. The stories look at the NPs’ lives before and during their tenure, hence this chapter’s title. Each principal’s journey is narratively presented through different headings signifying the significant plots. The chapter begins with Mholi’s story, followed by Ntozinhle, Ubuntu, and Maqhinga’s stories. After the stories are presented, I illustrate the emergent identities emerging from these stories, and show the connection between the plot and the emergent identity.

5.2 Mholi’s Journey: “The Natural Born Leader”

I travelled over four hours to meet Mholi, who leads a school in a deep rural area. I was referred to Mholi by one of the participants. Mholi means leader. I have given him the name Mholi because this is what his colleagues call him. Throughout our conversation, he also describes himself as a natural-born leader; hence, the name is fitting. As we were talking, he also mentioned the following:

I named my son Mholi. I gave him this name because this is how people refer to me. I thought it would be good to pass it on to my son. I am prophesying greatness upon his life.

Mholi is the only participant who did not do a collage. However, when we met for the first interview, he had written his story in point form, and he used these points as a reference to narrate his life. We had been communicating via WhatsApp. When we did meet, he struck me as a laid-back individual. It was easy to connect with him. In the following sections, I share Mholi’s journey to answer who Mholi is.

5.2.1 A Childhood of Strife

Ngazelelwa ekhaya (I was born at home), and my mother and father never married. When I was very young, my mother got married to my stepfather. She left me with her sister, my aunt, who raised me. She then moved on to live with her husband and her kids from her marriage. So, I grew up with my aunt and my cousin, Amanda. I have never had a relationship with my biological father. I don't know him. Throughout my childhood, I felt abandonment issues. I felt unloved and often neglected. I compared myself to Amanda, and this brought about resentment and anger. I was a loner and very anti-social. In my lonesomeness, I found peace. I could think, dream and plan for my future. So, I learned to be self-reliant, decisive, and strong-willed at a very young age. My peers often described me as serious and boring, sometimes arrogant because of these traits. I think I was just misunderstood. However, older people were drawn to me and often told me I had a bright future. This recognition gave me a sense of self-worth.

There were times when I felt overwhelmed, and on two occasions, I attempted to run away from home. The first time I tried to run away, I left home, and the weather was normal. While I was still going to get a taxi, the weather changed. It became pitch black like a storm was approaching, so I returned home. On the second occasion I attempted to escape, I reached Vryheid, a town about one and a half hours away from my home. When I reached the Vryheid taxi rank, I approached two gentlemen. I told them I wanted to go to Joburg and explained to them that I was not living in a conducive environment and situation at home. I also told them about my dream to become a superstar. One of the gentlemen, named Lumka, said, "It's fine Mholi, I will take you. First, you have to complete your matric." At that time, I was in Grade 10. They gave me money, and they gave me their contacts. I went back home and carried on going to school. I believe there was a Godly divine intervention in both failed attempts.

5.2.2 A Place of Refuge

At school, I found a sense of belonging for which I had always yearned. It was my place of refuge, where I could escape from the realities of the abandonment and exclusion I suffered at home. I did not excel academically, but I got good grades. I was very ambitious and always willing to take on available opportunities. I was what some would call a teacher's pet. I was always neat and punctual. I was respectful yet opinionated.

My teachers were a significant influence in my life. They were like parents to me. In our area, the teachers were not just teachers. They were also activists and made sure that they were positive role models for the youth. Their teachings and positive influence motivated me to

aspire to become a teacher and one day come and serve the community that had shaped and moulded me.

While in high school, one of my teachers encouraged me to attend church. It was my first experience with religion or any other ideological belief system. Upon hearing the gospel, I chose to become a Christian. My relationship with God was a new beginning. I started on a path of making peace with my feelings of abandonment. I began to learn to manage my anger and resentment. At the church, I not only found my heavenly father, but I also found my earthly father. My pastor took me under his wing and became the father I never had. For the first time in my life, I experienced fatherly love.

5.2.3 The Second Abandonment

After I completed Grade 12, my father (pastor) assisted me with applying to university. I was accepted to study education. I was excited. At this stage in my life, I had partially healed my old wounds and was looking forward to a new chapter. I expected my mother and aunt to support me in this new journey. Things did not happen as I had expected. I felt like they were abandoning me for the second time. This crushed me, and the pain from which I thought I had healed resurfaced. My father and his wife were my support structure when I arrived at the university. They supported me emotionally, spiritually, and financially.

5.2.4 The Struggles of Transitioning into University Life

My transition to university was a whirlwind. Luckily, I was not alone because other students from my area were also accepted, so we navigated the terrain together. I recall an incident that occurred on the second day of our arrival. We were split into groups and expected to play some games. The groups were diverse in terms of race. It was not easy because we were supposed to express ourselves in English, and at that time, we were not articulate. It was tough. I had been in an only Black school, and I had grown up in an all-Black community, so it was the first time I had an opportunity to engage with people of other races in close proximity.

We had to work hard to overcome the language barrier. We would work through the night and engage in intense research on unpacking concepts when we had to present. Remember that I had been alone and learned to do things independently for most of my life. At university, I had to unlearn this. I had to learn to work with people and come out of my anti-social shell.

For reasons unknown to me, other students were fond of me. I would get selected first, and sometimes I would be the only Black in the group. The other group members would encourage me and support me when I struggled. I am grateful I was thrown into the deep end. This helped

me to overcome my fears, to be brave, and not to shy away from challenges. It also helped me to be the kind of leader who can give people opportunities and make sure that I support and nurture individuals so they can succeed when given those opportunities.

It was not always smooth sailing. Sometimes I would also be the object of ridicule because of my accent. I learned to have a thick skin and to control my emotions. During classes, there were incidences where racial tensions rose to the point that students would end up insulting each other and making racial slurs. These incidents also occurred at the residences as well. In these instances, I would mediate and try to calm the situation. My ability to diffuse these situations earned me the respect of my peers.

5.2.5 “Umuntu Ngumuntu Ngabantu”

I do not know how it happened, but I was highly favoured. I had a lot of money during my studies. I worked at the compass offices and became the House Com. Through those jobs, I was able to survive at varsity. People believed I came from a well-off family because I could buy everything I needed (*chuckles*). They also thought I was from an urban area. I did nothing consciously to make them believe that; it just happened. I think it is partly because I was so nice to people. I was also clean and representable. I used to speak nicely to even the White students. We were still in the early phases of transitioning from apartheid, so racial tensions were high, and tolerance was low. That opened up opportunities for me. When there were job opportunities, I would hear from different people, and I could see that they were telling me because they had a particular perception of me.

5.2.6 Learning Leadership through Observation and Practice

Being “liked” extended beyond my peers. My lecturers were also fond of me even though I was an average student who sometimes struggled academically. I worked alongside distinguished and respected academics, and this boosted my self-esteem. It also provided me with multiple opportunities to learn and be on the front row of life’s greatest lessons. I was learning and being schooled when I was with the people I mentioned. They taught me to love. The way they treated me and supported me made me love and appreciate people. They also made me love education.

I looked at their work ethic and learned that one must serve with honour, love, and honesty. These are values I still hold close to me even today. This is who I am. I was also learning how to handle myself professionally. I would watch Prof Sithole addressing a student and telling them how they should have done their research, and from these observations, I learned how to

deal with people. I learned how to give constructive criticism. I still draw from these teachings and lessons. I know how to deal with people and behave professionally and ethically.

It was in those offices that I also learned how to articulate myself. I have become good at this public speaking thing. I get invited to be a guest speaker. Recently I was invited to come and address the youth and the community at large. I am also asked to be a Master of Ceremonies for various functions. I can deal with different people. I can read the room and the audience. I learned these skills in those offices.

I did not just get an opportunity to observe good leadership practices. I also got the chance to lead. I was elected as House Committee member and deputy chair of a religious organization on campus. In these positions, I cultivated various leadership skills. Being on the House Com was very challenging. As I said, racial tensions were high. When I made a decision, the White students used to say I was favouring my Black students. When the decision was unfavourable to the Black students, they said I was a traitor. There was no winning. I made sure that I used the varsity policies to guide me. I also sought advice from the professors I worked for and other House Coms before I engaged with the issues. Their wisdom and knowledge served me well because I could justify my decisions.

5.2.7 “Ngiwumuntu we Sizwe”

Mina ngiwumuntu wesizwe (I am a person of the nation). I do not have a person *wakithi* (blood relative); that is my philosophy. As much as I do have blood relatives, everyone is my family. From a young age, it has been strangers who have extended support to me. My teachers, my pastor, and all the great people I met at university. The love and support I received from strangers changed my reality. It taught me to love life, look forward to living, and fulfil my destiny.

Even when I graduated, I got the same favour. I did not have money for the academic attire and a suit. I had started working, but I had not been paid. A colleague of mine offered to hire the attire for me, and he also gave me a suit. I attended the graduation because I had always yearned for that feeling, that moment of walking on that stage. I also worked at the ceremonies as a student and had always envisaged the day I would walk on that stage. Even when working in the professors' offices, I would look at the graduation pictures they had with their students on their walls, and all these symbols inspired me to want to achieve it and experience walking through the stage one day.

5.2.8 My Experience as a Teacher

I entered the profession with enthusiasm and excitement, eager to make a difference. I taught at two different schools from 2008 to 2015. At both these schools, the principals insisted that I teach Grade 12. This is because I have always been committed to my work, can motivate learners, and am good at instilling discipline. I am the kind of disciplinarian that builds, instead of breaking a child. Therefore, that helped a lot of learners because all some needed was just some positive reinforcement.

I love being a teacher. I am very good at nurturing and mentoring people. I love working with the community and with children. I love children. The first time I was told I was loved was at school. So, I also tell my learners the same thing. I observed that learners have different problems. In some of those children, I saw many facets of myself. Like the teachers who taught me, I viewed and enacted my role as a teacher, father, friend, motivator, and so on. This is also the kind of leader I have become.

Education must be holistic and go beyond the content. I don't only teach content, but I teach life. I try to teach the learners values and behaviours to handle themselves. I teach things that they can draw from even in their adulthood. I also model life to them and how one ought to live. I treat the learners as tomorrow's adults because I believe I am teaching future leaders. I also do this because some learners do not have present parents.

I have produced accountants, lawyers, nurses, teachers, actors, actresses, etc. Two of my past students are in a show called Zalo. I am driven by passion, and my goal is to see a real transformation in the spaces I occupy and in the lives of those I meet. I believe that's what I'm living for, bringing about change with my power. *Ngiyazimisela* (I strive to do my best). I am self-motivated, respectful, and guided by integrity. I do not think we must define ourselves and learners by present circumstances. This is what I preach.

5.2.9 Being a Team Player

My tenure as a teacher taught me to be a team player. I learned how to work with different people irrespective of race, gender, age, and so on. The combined efforts of many are more significant than one person's effort. It is pointless to have learners excel in your subject and then have them not do so well in others. That is why teamwork and shared goals and vision are so important.

In this spirit of working with others and always wanting to go the extra mile, I was exposed to the school's different facets. I worked closely with the principals in both schools. They

delegated various tasks to me that were above my level. Through those tasks, I learned about the day-to-day running of the school, school administration, different departmental policies, working with external stakeholders, and fundraising, to mention a few. This helped me understand various aspects I draw from as a principal.

5.2.10 Building Broken Relationships

It took me eight years to ascend to the principalship position. I had prophesied this upon my life two years earlier in a post I had written on a social media platform. I was appointed to a school that was marred with factions. The teachers and the SGB were at loggerheads, embroiled in factional battles. I knew that I had to find ways to bring the staff together and mend the broken relations. I had heard that disputes over posts caused the factions. Being an outsider, I saw myself as neutral and knew I had to try and restore unity by rebuilding broken relationships. When relations are broken, it deters from the core business of teaching and learning. Secondly, people cannot flourish in a toxic environment. Thirdly, toxicity spreads like wildfire. I knew I had to curb the spread. I was transparent about my intentions and vision for the school when I was appointed. I wanted it to be a haven as it had been for me. I am still working on this, but there has been some progress. I took time first to understand the prevailing culture.

5.2.11 A Culture of Collaboration

While we are trying to mend the broken relationships, we are simultaneously trying to rebuild the culture of collaboration. The school is not the building. It is the people in it. I have made sure to focus on people and building relationships. Once we have a healthy working environment, we can focus on what we must do within the school. We cannot provide a meaningful teaching and learning experience in an unhealthy schooling environment.

To encourage the culture of collaboration, we had various staff sessions where we created a new vision and mission, revised school policies, and rebranded the school for its new era. I encouraged participation, and we had robust discussions and disagreements. I gave the teachers something they had been yearning for, the opportunity to voice themselves and the platform to participate in the issues close to them. I involve all stakeholders in decision-making. Working with others helps me to legitimize the decisions I make. It also assists me in identifying those with different talents and skills and in being able to give them the space to use them so we can achieve our school goals.

5.2.12 Setting Clear Directives

Another observation I made on arrival while observing the culture was that time was wasted because things just happened haphazardly. This troubled me because I value and respect time. I knew this was taking away from instructional time, and I had to change this culture of laxity towards time. To mitigate this, I set clear directives. I plan for the week and the month. I also stressed to the SMT to do the same. We have monthly briefing sessions where we deliberate on issues that may hinder school effectiveness. I have tasked one of the teachers to do a monthly planner that details events for the upcoming months. I have also created a task team for the induction and mentoring of new teachers.

I am not the kind of person who micro-manages people. I believe that we are professionals and know what we should be doing. Setting these clear directives has also encouraged the team to work independently. I think we've gotten to a stage where we know what we are here to do, and I give teachers their space to do that. Giving them autonomy is a way of showing that I trust them. They must behave professionally because it is what they also expect of themselves.

5.2.13 My Leadership Signature

I treat the teachers equally. They are all equal. I also tell them that just because I might spend more time with the deputy and other SMT members does not mean I love those people more. "I love all of you equally," I tell them during meetings. I have an open-door policy, and I am accessible. If someone comes to me and asks to go somewhere, I will allow them. In that way, they know they will not return unless it is for a legitimate reason.

You cannot please everyone in life, and everyone will not like you. "*Umntu angangkuthanda kodwa uyakuthanda ukudla okuphetha*" (a person may not be fond of you, but they may appreciate you because of the things you can do). That is my belief. If I do right by people, they don't have to like me, but my actions must compel them to at least respect me and the position I hold. That is why I practise what I preach.

I am not reactive. I am very discerning. This discernment has helped me choose the right time, place, and context to respond to and address issues. It has also assisted me in choosing my battles and being flexible. I am saying a lot of things at once, but what I mean is that not every misdemeanour must be dealt with, and if it has to be, I must apply my mind on how to tackle it so that when it is addressed, it can be constructive and prevent the same issue from happening.

I am also flexible. Being rigid does not work in some cases. Flexibility means that I must also be sensitive to the environment I find myself in. The reality is that our policies are not tailored

to speak to our circumstances. As such, I lead beyond the policy. The policy has specific stipulations that we cannot enforce because of the systematic challenges in which we operate. So if I have to bend policy to accommodate the department, I also have to bend it to accommodate the staff as they work beyond what is expected.

5.2.14 Focusing on the Instructional Task

I stress upon the Departmental Heads to work closely with teachers. We have to support and mentor them if they have challenges. We have to make changes in terms of subjects and grades if they are not producing good results. We monitor and moderate learners' work, homework, and tests. We analyse the results every term. We make plans if we see that learners are performing poorly. We have a strategy to ensure we achieve the goal we are here to accomplish.

5.2.15 Partnering with Parents

I believe that parents are significant stakeholders. I partner with them. Some are illiterate, but that does not mean they cannot participate and serve as assets to the school. I give them the space to participate in their children's education. When we have special days, like cultural days and I involve them so they can pass our heritage to the learners. There are many other ways we include parents. They trust us, and they want to work with us. I also have a strong, supportive SGB. The other day, one of my colleagues told me the parents were talking about me, saying that they thought I was a child, but now they know and acknowledge that this is a man. When I call a parent meeting, you would swear it is a payment of the grant because it is so full (*chuckles*). The parents come in numbers, and they respect me. They realize that I am committed to my work.

5.2.16 Being Appealing to my Audience

As a leader, I have had to adjust my way of doing. I am with young children now, so I have to be able to appeal to them and be relevant to them. The learners here know me very well. At home, I am the topic of discussion, "our principal is like this and that." I connect with them, communicate with them, and am accessible to them.

We have made our school a safe place for them to be children. Like myself, for some of them, school is the only place they can be children. We organize fun educational trips for them. Last year I organized the SABC to come through. I arranged for one of the Idols contestants to visit the school. We try our best to expose them to things, so they dream big. Because of the financial challenges the parents have, I always look for sponsorships so trips can be affordable. I want them to be happy and to have fun. I do not want to be in an unhappy school.

The challenge that still makes me cry is realizing that a learner comes from a home without love. The learner is not taken care of, not given food for days, is not bathing, and not having a school uniform. We still experience learners who stay with aunts, uncles, and grandparents who don't care for them. While there is not much we can do to change their circumstances at home, when they are here, in our care, we try our best to make them feel loved and worthy. If a learner does not have a uniform, we make a plan. If we can see that the learner is neglected, we rope in external stakeholders like social workers to intervene. We do all we can to secure their well-being.

5.2.17 Leading through God's Wisdom

I believe I have been placed here to inspire hope and bring transformation. I might not be here forever, but if I can change the lives of those I touch, it will have a ripple effect. Education is what has elevated me from a dark place. Strangers have been my angels in life. That is what I also try to be.

God has favoured me. He has added more wisdom to what I already had. I believe some things come to be if you speak and pronounce them. I believe I can speak things to life. You find conflict among teachers and other complicated issues in most schools, but I do not have such. Even the rifts that were here are being bridged. I always ask God for guidance and wisdom, and he always answers. That is why I trust the decisions I make.

The education I have has contributed. My life experiences have also contributed but above everything else, is God's wisdom and grace. Wisdom has enabled me to use this education to get where I am. Education without wisdom is futile.

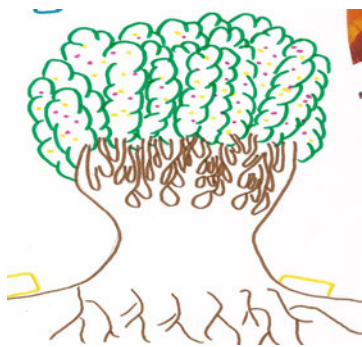
5.3 Ntozinhle's journey: "Made to do Great Things"

Mr. Zulu referred Ntozinhle to me. The name Ntozinhle means:

MADE TO DO GREAT THINGS

It is derived from the title she gave to her collage. Ntozinhle provided the following explanation for this title:

The title of my story is "made to do great things." Looking at my history, I believe that there are things that God wants me to achieve, so I do think that I was born to do and achieve great things.



5.3.1 My Family are my Roots

I come from a traditional family with a mother, father, and seven siblings. I am a middle child. The roots in the tree depict the interconnectedness and bonds that hold our family together. We were raised *ngokuthi siwazisa umdeni* (to acknowledge the importance of family). My family is a staunch Catholic, praying family grounded in strong Christian values. Respect is a fundamental family value that was instilled in us from a young age. We were taught to respect each other and other people. We were also taught to be accommodating. We were poor, but we always had relatives staying with us, and we never resented that. We used to share. I come from a sharing family. Oh, and love. Our parents loved us unconditionally.



My parents did not receive a formal education but had wisdom in raising children. That is why I also respect the input of older people. The elderly members are still a valuable resource in the community, and I always seek their counsel.



My father was the breadwinner. He worked on farms and did not earn much. My mother took care of us. My parents taught me teamwork. They were and still are a formidable team. Because of this, even though we did not have much in terms of material things, we always had joy and laughter at home. We were not consumed by the poverty that surrounded us. Our parents spoke great things upon us, encouraged us, and assured us that our circumstances do not define us. Hence, there is a lot that came out of my family *noma sasingeyilutho* (even though we were “nothing”). *Mina ngiyakwazi ukuhlupheka* (I know poverty), so I can resonate with the lived experiences of our learners. I cannot punish them for being in this situation; mine is to lessen the pain. That is what motivates me here, in this community. I know there is a brighter future for our learners, so I must ensure they can achieve it.

5.3.2 I am my Mother’s Daughter

I am my mother’s daughter. My mother was not just a housewife. She was a seamstress, taught Catechism at church, held leadership positions in the church, and had various community projects that she established to help other women. I often accompanied her to all these

activities, learning how she carried herself and led with love, compassion, and meticulousness. I draw much of my character from her. She was not a victim of poverty. Instead, she was a change agent, a community builder, and someone people looked up to and respected.

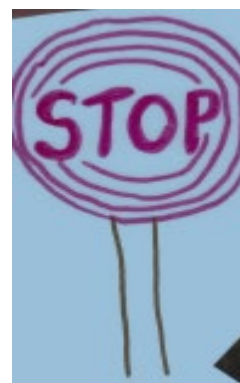
5.3.3 My Early Life Hurdles

When I completed Grade 7, I had to drop out of school. The distance from my house to the nearest high school was far away. My other three siblings were already in high school. My father could not afford to enrol me and pay for transport costs. My parents asked me to stop, and I obliged.

I looked for piece jobs to help my father support the family. It was a terrible and painful experience. I was working for a white woman, and I used to see my peers, happy, going to school while I had to go to work.

When I was paid, I used to give the money to my mother, and she would decide how to use it. She used to provide me with what she wanted to give me. There were no cell phones then, and life was very simple.

I was out of school for three years. I never lost hope that the opportunity would present itself again for me to go back to school. I just had that faith. It took me three years to return to school. Going back to school brought great joy to me. I went back, and I was able to complete my matric.



5.3.4 Taking a Path Less Travelled

After I matriculated, an unexpected urge confronted me. Something within was telling me to become a nun. I had been exposed to nuns my whole life. They had always fascinated me, but I had never wanted to become one. When I saw them, I used to say, “What is wrong with these people? I like them.” That’s where it would end.



I prayed and searched deep within. I had mixed feelings (as shown by the different leaves). It was not an easy decision to make. I asked myself, “What about my family? I have matric now. I can change things at home. I want a house someday, kids, and a car. What about my friends, my boyfriend? What is this? Why is it happening to me?”

When I finally decided to leave for the convent, it was a painful experience for my family and me. My sister had matriculated and fallen pregnant, so she discontinued her studies. My brother

had also matriculated and moved to Johannesburg to find employment. My parents had pinned their hopes on me, and they saw these shattered by my decision. They allowed me to go, but I think at the back of their minds, they thought I would not survive and would come back home. They gave me their blessing and prayed for me. My mother cried a lot. It took her a long time to forgive me for what I did. No one expected it; there were other expectations, and then overnight, BOOM! In the end, they said let God's will be done.

5.3.5 Life at the Convent



Life at the convent has its difficulties. It has tested and stretched me in various ways. When I arrived, I had to pause my journey again. I had to engage in the process of becoming a nun. This process happens in three stages. It involves learning the rules, the constitution, and all other issues relating to the convent and life as a Sister. It took me three years to complete these stages. After I finished, I had the option to continue my studies.

The Sisters evaluated my matric results. They were not happy with my performance. They advised me to go back to school. I took the advice and started in Grade 11. I completed and passed Grade 12 very well. After finishing, they said I could go to varsity because they had confidence I would cope.

5.3.6 The Sister: A Curious Case

University taught me to be assertive. You can imagine I was a young sister interacting with teenagers who were in the prime of their youth. They were so curious about my lifestyle. I was like a case study. During breaks, boys would hover around me, asking me personal questions. They could not understand and believe the commitment I had made. It was challenging, so I had to learn to be assertive so they could back off. I was young, and remember, I am also a human being. I also had a wandering eye like all teenagers, so it helped that I did not stay at res.

I was lucky enough to make friends. Even though they were not Catholic, they were and still are terrific friends. They were always around me, and they protected my vocation and stuff. There were three of us, and we had a special bond; we supported each other. If my work was not up to scratch, they would tell me and tease me and say, “this is not the convent; this is tertiary (*chuckles*). Stop putting issues about Jesus here (*chuckles*). This is an assignment. God will not save you.”

5.3.7 Seasonal Waves of Doubt

When I was about to complete my degree, my anxiousness resurfaced. I started doubting the decision I had made. I was looking at my future and thinking of how constrained I would be if I continued on my chosen path. If I decided otherwise, I would be driving the car I want. I would be living life on my terms. I would be able to do more for my parents. I do not know how I broke through those doubts, but I did, and I am still here. Doubts come to me seasonally; they still challenge me. However, I still believe there is a reason why I am here.

5.3.8 An Unexpected Turn

After I graduated, I started working. I loved teaching. I taught for 11 years at missionary schools. Eight of these years were spent in a well-resourced urban private school with middle-class parents. I then moved on to a rural school that was the opposite regarding resources, infrastructure, and the learner population's socioeconomic status. Despite this, because it was a Catholic school, the environment still had an element of home and safety. It was while teaching at this school that the unexpected happened.

The convent leadership approached me and requested that I apply for a principalship position. I declined because I was not ready for such a responsibility, and I believed I did not have the capabilities to execute it. I also felt they were setting me up for failure as the school had a bad reputation. I knew the history of this school, and everyone else did. The school was dysfunctional, and enrolment was dwindling. The community had lost faith in it. The school had been co-managed by the church and the government. However, the church had relinquished it entirely to the DBE. After this, there was an unending conflict over posts and positions.

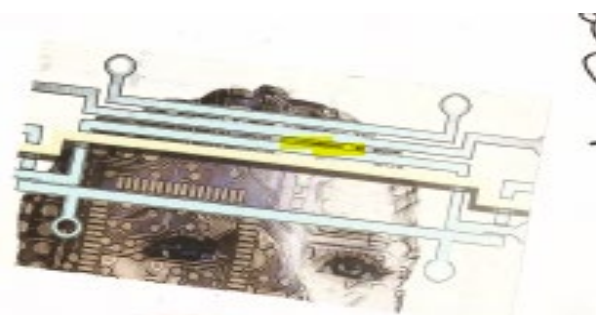
The previous principal was a young female. Allegedly, she was always absent. They used to say she managed the school remotely with a remote control. When she did come, she would give orders and then leave again. She was a businesswoman and conducted her business affairs during school hours. As time passed, the community caught wind of this and facilitated her removal through a protest. In all of that, though, she must be acknowledged because she is the one who improved the school's infrastructure. She did this all the while she was hardly here. She spoke to the inspectors and pushed for the building to be built, as you see here it stands. Toward the end of the construction of the school, she was removed.

After her removal, a male took over. The challenge with him is he had never been a teacher. He was *isishosho* (a prominent unionist) and was allegedly appointed because of his alliances with the organization. He took what he knew, politics, and brought it into the

school. *Zasha!* (things took a turn for the worst). His story is so sad because he eventually took his own life. After him, things were on a downward trajectory, and three principals later, I am here.

5.3.9 My Vocation was Shaken

This request shook my vocation. I thought, “I am already a failure. I will expose myself to the world, and everyone else will know I am also a failure.” I even considered running away from



the convent and never coming back. I was overwhelmed with fear. I was full of negative emotions, fear, worry, anxiety, and self-doubt. I was happy where I was. I was a class teacher, teaching my learners, which was my happy place.

I asked myself, who were they protecting from coming here such that I had become the sacrificial lamb? I was deeply hurt and felt betrayed. I fell into a depressive state. Even though it was clear that I was in a precarious situation, the church leadership persisted with the request. They assigned a spiritual director to counsel me. The counselling and support helped me. I was able to realize some of the qualities I had that would be able to serve me as a leader. However, I was still adamant that I did not want the position. Because of the pressure, I played along, knowing I would not do what was asked.

5.3.10 Up and Down: Déjà vu



One of the Sisters was tasked with helping me with a CV. On the day I was supposed to submit the CV, I experienced hurdles. I left school later than I had expected. On the way there, I entered a pothole in the road, and the car was stuck in the hole. At that time, it was about 15:10, and it was the closing day. I was happy that God was protecting me and that this would not be my problem. I arrived at precisely 16:00. After submitting, I felt relieved. I knew I would not be shortlisted because I lacked management experience.

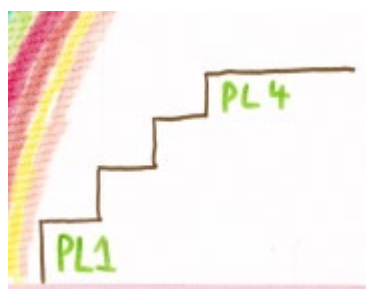
A couple of months passed, and I heard nothing. I was returning to my old self and had left this whole drama behind. I received another request. I was asked to apply for a deputy principal (DP) post at the same school. The pressure started again now.

It was déjà vu. They said if plan A failed, then this would be plan B. I did apply. I was shortlisted for both positions and went for my first interview. A week later, I was called in

again for the DP interview. I was devastated and desperate for someone to help me out of this. The evening before the interview, I notified them that I had an emergency at home and did not go. I didn't even go to work that day. It was the first time I had been absent from work. A considerable amount of time passed with no news. Once again, I was happy and regaining my old self because I was sure my prayers had been answered.

5.3.11 The Turning Point

It was the first of May 1, and I was in a jolly mood that day. I was lying on my bed, wearing my shorts, legs up, and my phone rang. I answered the call. The speaker introduced himself as



Umhloli (Chief Education Specialist) and said, “congratulations, you have been appointed as the principal of Siyathuthuka. You were supposed to assume duty today, but you can come tomorrow”. Please be there by 8:00. I will introduce you. Thank you, Ntozinhle. I will see you tomorrow.”

I felt my intestines roll. The trauma I had felt and experienced came back rushing. I felt a flood of tears roll down my eyes. *Lamane langishaya namanje uvalo. Uwena ozongisukela njalo ungivisela ama minute (giggles)* (I can feel the panic as we speak. You are making me relive it through this conversation).

There was no time to waste. After processing the message, I wiped my tears and went to notify the principal at her school. She was my first counsel. She gave me a few pointers for my first day. I packed my belongings and left for the unknown: a new home, school, and position.

5.3.12 A Sleepless Night

I hardly slept on the eve of my inauguration. The Sisters watched me like a hawk because they feared I might run away. They tried to calm and reassure me, but I could not even hear what they were saying. While I was fighting the voices in my head, I heard one of them say:

”*Uzothini?*” (What are you going to say?)

I responded, “*Nithini manje?*” (What are you saying now? What are you talking about?)

“What have you prepared for the staff and the parents? Don't you know that when a person is introduced, they must give a speech? Sit down and write a speech.”

Kwaze kwasa ngicorrecta isingisi (It took me the whole night to correct the speech). They took turns reading it and telling me what to add and remove. I sat with the DP from the high school, and she said, “you must convince people that you are the right leader. *Uyakubantu lapha abangakwazi, kumele babone ukuthi usufikile* (You are going to people who do not know you, they must see that you have arrived). You must inspire them”.

5.3.13 D-Day

In the morning, there was a buzz in the air. They were preparing tea and meals for the day. Everything was happening at the convent. “*Kuzobekwa uPrincipal omusha, uyadlala wena*” (Today we are installing the new principal), said the then SGB chairperson. She was running around the convent, preparing stuff as if it was her home. She was so excited. I was numb. It was like I was in a bad dream. *Kwakumnyama amehlo* (It was a sunny day, but for me, it looked dark).

Umdloli (the CES) was late. When he arrived, twenty or so Sisters escorted me to the school. I felt like *amatshwele phansi kwesikhukhukazi* (chicks under a hen). I was in the middle of them, and people were unsure which Sister it was. I think I went to the bathroom about four times. Whenever I stood up a Sister escorted me on every time I stood up. They were convinced I would hang myself or commit suicide (*laughs*).

When we arrived, *Umdloli* greeted us. He then asked where Sister Ntozinhle was because I was right in the middle of the Sisters. He asked me to go and sit with him and the SGB. My armour and protection were gone. I felt naked even though fully clothed in my tunic. People were looking at me.

5.3.14 Rising to the Occasion

I was looking at people’s faces and they were doing the same. Others were speaking among themselves. Others were giggling, others smiling, others with blank stares. I felt an adrenalin rush and felt this overwhelming shift. I lifted my face and eyes and started looking at people. I told myself this is the time; I will do this. *Umdloli* introduced me, spoke a few words, and allowed me to speak.

I spoke bravely and articulately. I had asked for a podium so that people would not see me shake, and just in case I trembled and my speech fell, I did not need it at that moment. As I spoke, I saw people slowly taking notice. Even those who had initially shown disinterest raised their heads. For the first time in over nine months, I believed that I could do this.

After I finished, *Umhloli* gave me a handshake, introduced me to the learners, and immediately left me. He did not even stay for the tea. *Ngasala kanjalo nesikole sami* (That is how I was left with the school). The then Acting Principal was asked to show me the office and walk me through the school. There was no other handover. People had tea and left. I had to take on my new role, Ntozinhle, the principal.

5.3.15 Learning to Swim in the Ocean

When I arrived to work the next day, there was a knock on the door, I had to learn, and I had to learn fast. I had to shift gears.” *Manje Thisha Omkhulu* (principal)...this and that, *kuze kube imanje* (up until now).” There was no time to settle in. That morning I was given documents that had to be submitted to the circuit, and that was that. No one was interested that I had just moved from post-level one, and no one was interested in my newness.

There was also a lot of curiosity around my appointment. The staff had already learned I was not in a management position. I knew they would not take me seriously if they realised how little I knew. I found a mentor. It was the principal at my neighbouring school. She is the one who taught me about my responsibilities and how to execute them. She would come during the break as if she was coming for tea. She would teach me during this time. Whenever I was stuck, I called, and she assisted. Even when they came to ask to test me, I always tried to be a step ahead so they would not know that I did not know. I would quickly call her, get an explanation, and revert to the query. She has been my anchor.

I don’t think I would still be here if it were not for her support. I only received induction three months after being appointed. It was over a couple of days and very general. I left there not gaining much and still underprepared. There is no attempt to develop newly appointed novice principals on how to lead as principals. Collectively, we are called to a meeting, and what happens there is that you get scolded. When we attend workshops, we are asked about administrative things. Have you submitted this document, payroll issues, and so on? There are those on managing school finances workshops, but nothing is directed at cultivating leadership skills for novice principals. One has to fend for themselves and navigate the challenges.

5.3.16 Entrusted with and Fulfilling the Mandate

When I, Ntozinhle, was appointed these were the words of advice and mandate I was given at the convent:

“We have lived with, and we know you. We know your flaws as well. You can sometimes be easily irritated. Go there and work at your own pace. We will give you the space to do that.

You are not going there to be forceful and give orders. You are going there to lead. Have a plan. We trust you. You are going there to represent us.”

When I arrived, I was transparent and honest about my intentions. In my first address to the staff, I was sincere. I told them there were issues we would be able to solve that year. I also observed and understood the school’s prevailing culture, politics, and internal dynamics. I know that change will not happen overnight, so I am patient. I make small, incremental changes. It is not smooth sailing. Even when they started to refuel the fires, there was restraint because I am a Sister, and they respect that. My vocation is my shield.

Having inherited such a situation is not an excuse to justify failure. However, I realized that I must be able to manage expectations by setting realistic goals. I do not want to promise the world and not deliver. Nor do I want to pretend that I have the power to bring about change on my own. There was also an added expectation that things would happen miraculously as if we did not have to do the work. We have short-term, medium-term, and long-term plans for the school. That is what we are using to turn around the school. We created these plans together, and all had the opportunity to provide input. Each day I see people trying to fulfil them; that is progress for me.

I am not here to run a one-woman show. I work for people and with people. When I arrived, I adopted an open-door policy. From what I heard, this office was a no-go zone. I opened the office and communicated to all stakeholders (learners, parents, teachers, etc.) that I was here to serve and wanted them to engage with me. The people around me are assets. I told them I needed them, their skills, and their talents to turn the school around.

I am learning to accommodate different opinions and views and to be flexible to see things differently. Anyone can propose. We then deliberate and discuss a way forward. They like that consultative approach. Sometimes they lead, and I follow. I see that working for me. While observing, I realized that others were more committed and wanted to support me. Therefore, I also have those who I have made my allies. If I know there is a deadline, I call on them. I trust them, and they have not let me down thus far. I get judged and labelled that I have favourites and prefer working with specific individuals, but I know they are on board, and at the end of the day, all we do is for our learners.

I also acknowledge their excellent work and give credit where it’s due. We all need motivation and recognition. If you reward good work and show appreciation even when something that should not happen happens, they will acknowledge it and change because they know that you

also see good in them. I think it is essential to “relax,” but I do not mean to let things go out of hand.

5.3.17 Creating a Culture for Teaching and Learning

My main goal is for us to be able to provide our learners with a holistic educational experience. Trying to transform this school has been challenging. I see myself as being faced with a field full of overgrown weeds. I am not saying that those before me have not ploughed and removed some weeds. I am saying that for the soil to be fertile again, much more must be done. That is why I use things like those mentioned above to ensure quality teaching and learning.

I could have come in and focused on the work, but I could not separate the work from the people. I cannot be everywhere. Teachers must want to work. These are some things we are doing to create a conducive culture of teaching and learning to fulfil this goal. (She points to the posters on the wall). We are protecting instructional time. I observed that time was wasted on meetings and other activities because of poor communication and planning. This has stopped. We have weekly briefings, and if there is an urgent matter, we disseminate the information such that there is minimal disruption.

This year we reshuffled teachers’ duty loads. We analysed the results and realized some were struggling in their subjects. We had a staff meeting and raised these concerns. Some teachers came to me and voiced that they were given subjects as a way to punish them. It was known they would struggle with them. I was shocked. We have now done duty loads such that teachers are allocated subjects according to their strengths. Not everyone is content, but we will keep using data to help us do better. We have also emphasized monitoring academic work and the academic programme.

I believe in a holistic approach to education. We offer our learners extra-curricular activities that teach them different skills and allow them to have fun. These are children; unfortunately, this environment has scarce opportunities for recreational activities. We want them to at least have them when they are at school.

This also extends to making this school a haven, a place of love, hope, and comfort. I was shocked and taken aback when I arrived here. As I have mentioned, the learners here come from impoverished backgrounds. Most of them, almost 90%, do not have parents. They are orphans. They live with their grandparents. Those who do have parents have parents who live in the city. When you ask for a parent, you expect a child to come to the school, but you become dismayed when the grandparents come, limping or with a walking stick.

For example, I cannot be a principal who constantly calls in parents for trivial issues. We cannot say we want a cake sale, and the kids must bring baked goodies. We cannot be harsh on learners who come here having not done their homework. Instead, we must navigate these issues.

5.3.18 The Context Demands that I be an All-rounder

We have to start just by reaffirming the children and uplifting their spirits. Above everything else, our learners need love. They need to experience being children. As you can see, this school has no paving. I come here clean every morning. The kids will run up to me, hug, and tug me. It is not because they are ill-disciplined: they are looking for affection. I have accepted that I come in clean and leave dirty. It is part of the job. I always say this to teachers; let us love our learners like our children. When you go to class, be love, and all the rest will fall into place. Build a relationship with them. Once they know you love them, you have that relationship. They will be attentive when you teach your content because they know and feel you care for them.

We have to go beyond the call of duty, and we have to be all-rounders. We are police officers, nurses, teachers, social workers, cooks, and kitchen girls. Our kids lack the basics. They have torn uniforms. Some have no uniform. Some come to school dirty. We wash their clothes. We bathe them. I cannot explain it. It is so touching. I think God brought me here to uplift these children and this community – to bring hope. I believe that I have been placed here to be used as a medium to transform their lives and bring some sense of normal in a bizarre, abnormal situation. They might not get there, but I will try.

5.3.19 Walking the Talk

I also practice what I preach. I am now a leader, so I have to set the tone and behave professionally and ethically so that they trust my leadership and me. I have to first model and be what I say. I am self-disciplined. I come to work early. I treat everyone with respect, am open-minded, and listen to others. I am consistent in how I treat people. I do not have favourites, but I do have individuals who I work closely with. It is not because they are better. It is because I can rely on them and have their full support. Above all, I love the children I teach.

You must also remember that the vocation that shields me can be a double-edged sword. If I behave in a way that does not uphold it, it will not protect me. I am human. I experience anger, irritation, and every other emotion. I have to rise above that. Even when someone is annoyed with me, and there is an altercation, I have to respond without necessarily lashing back at them

and engaging them with the same emotions. It is not easy work because I work with different characters and personalities, and some people intentionally push your buttons to see how you will react.

5.3.20 Taking Charge and Asserting my Authority

The situation of squabbles over positions is still rife. Some problems require me to make tough and unpopular decisions and use a top-down approach. Currently, two individuals are acting as Departmental Heads (DHs) in the same post. I know that isn't very clear, but it was like that when I arrived. I asked the CES and was cautioned not to intervene as this matter involved union squabbles.

They are at loggerheads. You know, the office you were sitting in is supposed to be occupied by the DH but is now vacant. I requested they not occupy it because if the other comes in first, the one that comes in after will accuse them of leaving imithi (witchcraft things). They will then speak to their alliance, which escalates into a wildfire. So, I just asked that they work in their classes instead because they cannot tolerate each other.

5.3.21 Surfing the Waves

The rainbow has different colours, much like how I have experienced leading. One day it is red. One day it is yellow, and one day it is blue. That is my life as a new principal. There is no certainty. I feel like I am surfing the waves (*chuckles*). Mind you. I can't even swim, so imagine the terror. Though filled with storms, it has been fulfilling, like a rainbow after a storm.



5.3.22 My Steps are Ordered

I feel an imaginary star is guiding me. My steps are ordered. Honestly, the feedback I am getting from some of the staff and parents is very positive. They are happy with the progress thus far. Our enrolment numbers have increased. The school is on an upward trajectory. That is fuelling me to do even better.

I seek his guidance to be all that I need to be. I pray every day about my work. I pray before coming to work because I do not know what each day brings and what I will face. God is humbling me. I am being shaped positively and see myself growing from some of my old, toxic habits. I pray for this ability to be non-reactive, calm, and consistent in how I engage and treat people.



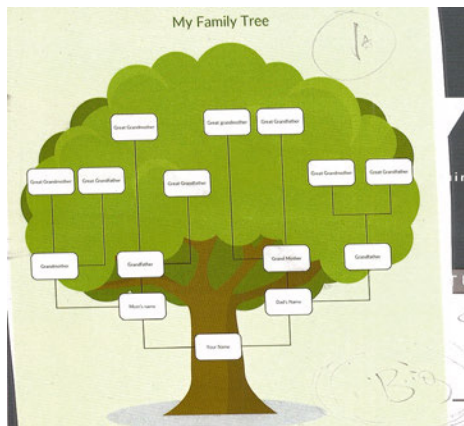
As such, this journey has made me even closer to God. I am growing spiritually.

5.4 Ubuntu's Journey: "Passion is my Fuel"


Ubuntu is Maqhinga's critical friend. We had been meeting, engaging about the process, and arranging times, but something always came up when we had to meet. Whenever this happened, he informed me and reassured me that he would make time, which he eventually did. We met with Ubuntu at my house for most of the sessions. He even did the collage during our first meeting.

Ubuntu is a Nguni word that describes an African philosophy. This philosophy is embedded in values of compassion, respect, dignity, and humanity, to mention a few (Malunga, 2009; Nzimakwe, 2014). The name has been given because these are the values that Ubuntu described as part of his essential being. His **HUMANITY**.

5.4.1 My Home was the Village



My father was a polygamist and had two wives. There are four of us, *esiswini sikamama* (maternal siblings) and eight altogether (paternal siblings). We all lived within the same homestead, which housed my uncles, aunts, and cousins. So, our homestead was like a little village.

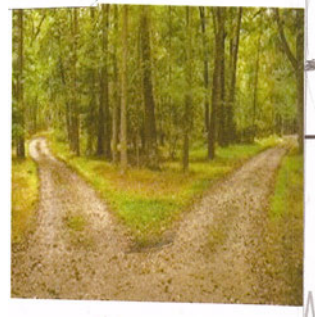


Different people groomed me, and I looked up and drew from each of their characters. Living in this communal way helped me learn to live with others, be accommodating, and be tolerant of diverse views. My family was relatively affluent in the community. We grew up during a time rife with political violence and instability, so most families did not have much.

5.4.2 The Boy who had to Become a Man

When I was ten, my mother took my siblings and me, and we left the family homestead. Our life changed in the blink of an eye. It became difficult. My father, who had been the breadwinner in our family, no longer supported us. My mom tried to make ends meet by knitting jerseys and sewing uniforms to make money. She also started buying fresh produce, and we had to go out and sell the produce. We kept this trade up until she found a job in an industrial area. She worked very long hours. Being the eldest, I was responsible for taking care of my siblings. I had to grow up, and I had to do it quickly. In hindsight, I realise this was my first leadership experience.

Our life continued in this way until I was in Grade 12. In matric, I had another unfortunate incident, I failed. This was not my first encounter with failure. I had also failed grades one and three. The difference was that I had no option but to return at those stages. Now there were two paths from which to choose. I was older and had the alternative of seeking piece jobs instead of repeating the grade. The latter was also more fashionable among my peers. When I failed, my brother was in Grade 10. I knew I had to set a good example for my siblings and teach them that failure was not the end of the world. I had to set the precedent that school was important.



5.4.3 The Matriarch: My Strong Tower

STRONG TOWER!

It was not all me, though. My mother was not formally educated, but she valued education. I remember her saying, “*hamba uyoqeda u 10!*” (go back and finish matric). It was non-negotiable. My mother has been and continues to influence my life significantly. When we left our homestead, I did not think we would make it, but we did. During those days, women who left their husbands were frowned upon. I used to hear other women commenting on how stupid she was to leave a comfortable life and subject her children to poverty. I am sure she heard these things as well. However, she was focused on us and making ends meet that she did not break, at least in front of us.

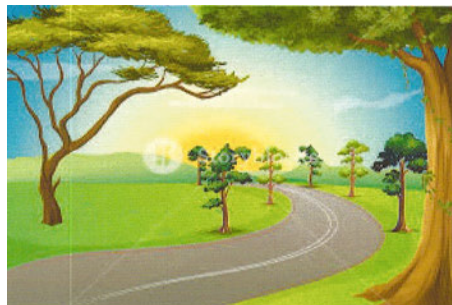
My mother could assume both roles, that of a mother and that of a father. She was very strict. She had to be. Role models were scarce, and it was easy for young men to be lured into the struggle. Her focus was on us being educated. During those times, we did not receive books and stationery, but she ensured we had all we needed to focus on our education. She was a strong pillar in our family, a matriarch. The way she brought us up, the values, and the discipline she instilled still carry me today.

5.4.4 Paying through Service

The path I chose had other implications. I had to relocate to another village and stay with relatives to re-enrol for matric. The relatives I moved in with were in a similar financial position. My mom did contribute financially to my stay, but I knew I was an additional burden. I pulled my weight by doing chores and being handy. I tried to pay for my stay through service.

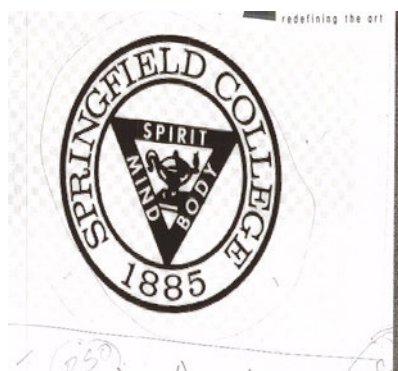
I tried to be invisible and visible. Invisible by not being a nuisance but visible by adding a valuable contribution to the household. It was tough, but at that phase in my life, I had accepted that struggle was part of life.

My perseverance paid off, and I passed matric. Options were limited. One could be a nurse, a police officer, or a teacher. So, I opted for teaching. As luck would have it, some scholarships were available. I applied, and I was awarded the scholarship. There was finally some light in the long road I was journeying on.



5.4.5 Life at the College

When I arrived in the city, I experienced a culture shock. I had never been exposed to other races, so I had to learn to integrate into this new space and express myself in English. The whole space was intimidating. All my life, I had attended poorly resourced schools. It was my



first time seeing a library and computer, and we were attending lectures in a large auditorium. I was overwhelmed. The first year was challenging, but I adjusted quickly with the support of friends I met. They were focused and determined to succeed despite the odds.

When I arrived, I did not have a passion for teaching. I had taken it because of the limited opportunities available back then. Once we started learning and engaging, my passion was ignited. It was not the content but the lecturers and the care they took to nurture us. I fell in love with teaching because I saw it as a vocation that would place me in a strategic position to change the lives of others. The training we received was proper preparation that still serves me as a principal.

5.4.6 Ascending the Ranks

When I started teaching, I looked at things differently from other colleagues. I was hands-on, took the initiative, and always availed myself. The school was poorly resourced. All we had was the board and chalk. I requested the school to buy a laptop. I organised staff training on basic computer skills so they could also learn how to use it. We started typing the lesson plans, mark sheets, and tests. There was resistance from others, but we soldiered on.

The next challenge was making copies. I researched and found that we could get printing done at the resource centre. So, we used to type and go print in town. After printing, we would travel

to the resource and make copies. I was promoted to Departmental Head (DH) after four years because of some of these initiatives and others.

Upon appointment, there was no leadership and management training. Although I only had experience in Humanities, I led the Commerce, Languages, and Humanities department. I networked with my ex-college friends, who were specialists in these areas, and they assisted me when I needed help. They workshopped teachers and mentored those struggling with content matter and delivery. I also established a similar peer network for teachers, and they came together with those of other schools and jointly planned, did assessments, and engaged in peer learning.

Our school had two DHs, and we did not have a deputy. The other DH was senior to me and was expected to take over, even if we got a DP post. The principal kept me close, asking me to attend meetings in her absence, seeking my advice, and delegating other admin duties. It was uncomfortable because others thought I was doing this to side-line the senior DH. In 2015 she was promoted to another school. In the process of filling that post, the principal went on leave, and I was appointed as the Acting Principal (AP).



I was full of mixed emotions. However, I believed this was just another challenge I could overcome. I expected the *Umhloli* (CES) would come and induct me and offer support, given that she was aware that the senior DH had left and there was no other SMT member.

When I met *Umhloli*, it was brief and quite uninspiring. “You are an Acting Principal now. We expect good results”. I got home and started thinking about what I needed to do and what this meant. I realised that I had acquired some experience in the day-to-day running of the school. I had always offered my help to the principal and attended meetings on his behalf. As a boy, when I watched over my siblings, I had to exercise patience, delegate, and so on. I hit the ground running.

I assembled the team that was going to help while the principal was away, and a DH was promptly promoted. My ambitions had grown, and I now saw myself as the future principal of the school. I, therefore, did not take the acting post lightly. I saw it as an opportunity to demonstrate that I was worthy of being the principal.

5.4.7 Being Invisible and Visible

According to the Department, the school's performance was average. We were always in the region of 60 to 75%. There was one year where we had achieved 92%, though. I recalled the other thing that *Umdloli* had said, "you must maintain and improve the pass rate." Those words stuck on me like glue. No matter what I did, I knew I was a goner if I let that slip. In my two years as an AP, we slightly improved the matric results under challenging circumstances.

Being an AP comes with its dynamics. Some see you as a caretaker and challenge you; others want you to prove yourself and have impossible expectations; others offer support and help. It is as if you are in limbo. You cannot make any drastic changes because you might be gone the next day, so you must tread carefully. So, while I was visible, I also remained invisible. I let my deeds speak for me.

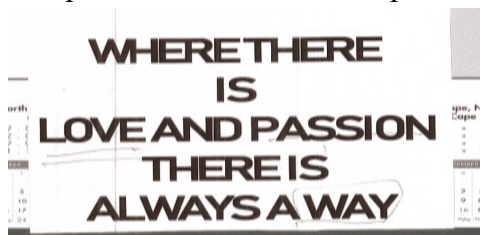
5.4.8 My Newness is a Gift

I take my newness as a gift. I am open about it and constantly remind myself and the staff that every new thing we try makes us novices because we have never done it before. When I was appointed, I also communicated that initiating change was about evolving and moving to another level. Some were saying, "we were doing just fine." I wanted them to realize that fine was not good enough. In my years as an AP, our results did not improve that much. When I took over permanently, we started having significant improvements. Last year we managed to surpass 92%, the highest the school had achieved in its history. That says being a novice does not mean one cannot lead. The results are proof of that.

Being me is my superpower. All I have to offer is my authentic self which is leading by example, setting a positive tone, communicating, and giving people space to participate. It is being a servant leader, working for and with people. I am active in all activities, so that is how I get the buy-in of others. If I were to try to force them, the regulations and the policy would not assist me because they are not compelled to do some of the things they do. It is all about trying to constantly motivate them, acknowledging the work that they do, and showing them appreciation.

5.4.9 Passion is my Fuel

The passion and love I developed for teaching at college is my number one driver. It fuels me.



In addition, the family values my mother instilled in me have carried me. *Ukuba nobuntu kubalulekile* (having ubuntu is important). I treat people with kindness and dignity. I am respectful, and I am approachable. That is how I treat teachers and learners alike. I have instilled a culture where we treat and talk to each other respectfully. I have seen a transformation in some of our ill-disciplined learners, who have started to unlearn some negative behaviours.

Nokuzithoba, nokukwazi ukuzehlisa uxolise kubalulekile (being humble and being able to apologise is very important). Just because I am a principal does not mean I am perfect. I make mistakes, and I falter. I must be able to acknowledge them and make them right. I believe that people reciprocate what you give out. You attract the same energy you give. That is how I win the hearts of those I lead and influence them to thrive for excellence.

RESPECT

I was taught that *uyahlonishwa umsebenzi* (you must respect your job). I make sure that I am punctual. Even when I am not feeling well, I come to work and do what I must. By the way, I am not saying this is going the extra mile; this is what should be happening. Sadly, it is not in some cases. We hear the most upsetting stories at principals' meetings about the behaviour of some of our colleagues.

5.4.10 Creating a Culture of Sisterhood and Brotherhood

I have tried to create a culture of sisterhood and brotherhood among us. Being at work is like being with your family. You quarrel, you disagree, you agree, and you get annoyed with each



other, but at the end of it all, you reconcile because you are family. I feel this is what has worked for us. We have this unspoken connectedness that gives us a shared purpose. The learners are our children. Without them, we will be jobless. But that is not what makes us love them. We love them because we have taken on the parent role as well. My mother did her best, never giving up on me, even when I

failed. That is the same kind of approach we take with our learners. We all need each other.

Our connectedness has also made us realise that we have a similar history. Most of us attended schools that face similar challenges as this one. Most of us come from similar backgrounds as

our learners. We can resonate with their struggles. They are us. We know from our own experiences that if we can change the life of one learner, we can affect and change the whole family's livelihood. I always say that we must understand that we are not just teachers. We are change agents. Giving our learners proper education, exposing them to opportunities, and motivating them to further their careers can significantly impact our society. Because of this shared history, I do not have to do that much to convince teachers to go beyond the call of duty and go the extra mile.

With the family approach, we intervene in issues concerning our learners' well-being. Other issues may be insignificant elsewhere, but they affect us here. There are many social ills in this environment. Some come from child-headed homes. Learners come late because some have to travel long distances, others have to do chores in the morning, and others have to drop off their children at crèche and many other issues. Some are neglected. A learner will be absent when they are menstruating because they do not have sanitary towels. Some learners have parents who are alcoholics who abuse them, and some have been raped and impregnated by uncles or their mother's boyfriends. The parents and guardians absolve all responsibilities to the school once they have enrolled the learner. I get this kind of information from having an open-door policy and communicating with the learners. Once I understand the learner's situation, I can extend and direct the support they need. We cannot ignore these stories when they come to us. We have to act and get them the help they need. As a principal, I need to be empathetic to these issues. They are obstacles to our learners. I once was that learner who travelled a long distance to get to school, so I know what they go through.

A lot of teaching time is also wasted and lost on trivial matters. Some learners are just not used to a routine and are used to a dysfunctional environment. Others act up because they have internalized the toxic things that have been said to them. Others want attention and recognition, and misbehaving is one of the ways they can get this. A learner will wear the full school uniform and then have a hat on, knowing it is not allowed. When you get to class, you waste substantial time trying to get them to settle down. When they have to take down notes, some will ask to go and borrow a pen. These are day-to-day struggles we must try to prevent by instilling discipline and a sense of responsibility in our learners.

5.4.11 Working with Others

I am not a lone ranger. I work with the staff, external organisations, and stakeholders to support the learners. I am grateful that the team shares a similar vision. Because of the context, we have

the vision to make the school a second home – a place of safety and refuge. That is what we try to do. Working with others is also beneficial because it increases the pool of resources. People have different abilities and capabilities, so drawing on this existing capital is essential. Through this, we have been able to start extra-curricular activities. This missing element is vital for our learners' holistic development.

Most recently, I have tried to get the community on board. I approached the local businesses and the taxi association to partner with the school to get more resources and alliances. I approached them with the SGB so they could also have a sense of ownership because they relegated most of their duties to me. This has helped because I see the SGB members starting to work autonomously and following up. We have received some support from some of the businesses we have approached, which has been very uplifting. Even when learners are stuck for transport, the taxi association is always there to help us. I am doing this because the school is not an island. We need our community to support us and to feel that they are valued.

I have learned that as much as I may draw from the capabilities and skills of others and as much as I may work with others, I need to ensure that we have an environment fertile for a culture of collaboration. I do this by giving people the space and opportunity to use their talents and trusting them to make decisions. If they make a mistake, it is not the end of the world. I believe that out of those mistakes, they are learning. We will look at the course of action taken and see what we can do better next time. If I do not trust them and allow them to take the initiative and develop ideas, I will not know what they are good at and how good they are.

The school is not mine. It is ours. One day I may not be available at school, and somebody will be expected to take the helm. When that day comes, they should be ready. I was prepared through the exposure and opportunities I received when the senior DH was promoted. The principal showed me the ropes and aided my learning. I, therefore, try by all means to ensure that I provide the same opportunities to others. Sometimes I decide to come late or not go to school and go directly to a meeting. I do this to give them a chance to self-manage. I expect them to be able to run the show in my absence. When I do that, I do not wish for them to call me whenever a decision has to be made. I also open the space for them to come up with ideas and then also give them the freedom to implement those ideas or do the activities they propose if they will benefit the learners.

5.4.12 A Strong Focus on Teaching and Learning

I do not doubt the competence of the teachers in this school regarding pedagogical knowledge and teaching skills. If circumstances were different and we could be transplanted to an ex-model C school with all the facilities we need, we would be able to achieve a 100% pass rate. Even with our learners, if they lived under different socioeconomic circumstances, I am sure they would be able to perform better than they already do.

That being said, we remain committed to advancing the teaching and learning agenda. All the other things I have mentioned are done to ensure we can offer our learners a positive learning experience. We know we are working against the tide, so we must put in the extra effort. We work during the weekends and even extend the school day. When we extend the school day or have extra classes, we must make arrangements, so learners and teachers can get transport to go home. We can now do this because of our partnership with the association. We notify them to change the pick-up time when we have the extra classes.

The DHs are critical in supporting teachers and monitoring the curriculum and learners' work and progress. Most recently, they have been experimenting with co-teaching. Teachers teaching the same subject work closely together and even swap the teaching of certain sections. This seems to be working because the teachers are engaging in peer learning. They also moderate each other's assessments and class activities.

Every term, we analyse the results to identify challenges and respond with intervention strategies. This also helps us identify learners with the potential to get As and those that may not make it if they are not given extra support. It also allows us to see if a teacher is struggling in a subject. When we identify this, we can provide support in this regard.

The positive results we are getting from our efforts have positively influenced our learners. There is a renewed sense of commitment in some of them. There is even a healthy competitive spirit in them in terms of wanting to outperform each other. We have an awards ceremony with broad categories to recognize all talents. We assist our Grade 12 learners with applications to tertiary institutions and bursaries. Despite the challenges, the school is alive with possibilities. There is a positive vibe.

GO AN EXTRA MILE 

When I talk about going beyond the call of duty and going the extra mile, I am talking about the panel beating we do. The term panel beat might seem negative, but I use it because we are called the scrap yard school. Learners who have been suspended and ex-dropouts come here for a second chance. The CES even said that if a principal can see that a learner is likely to drop out, they must advise them to come to this school. As such, we have to dig deep with minimal resources. The reality is most of our learners are demotivated. Some do not even see the value of education because they look at others who have matriculated sitting at home unemployed. Therefore, before anything, we must make them believe this is a worthy pursuit. We bring in ex-learners who have succeeded in sharing their stories. We have to make them look beyond their circumstances and environment. This is not easy because it means I must be intentional in what I do and say. This is not a solo effort or a cosmetic ploy to trick them. It has to be authentic and come from a good place. It requires consistency and alignment in what we say and how we act. I cannot say they are capable, but the next day I give up on them when they disappoint me. I have to keep at it.

5.4.13 Investing in my Professional Development

I balance my efforts of capacitating those I lead by also investing in my professional development. The opportunities for professional development by the department are scarce. The induction into principalship was a workshop that did not even consider whether one was a novice or an experienced principal. It also happened nine months after my appointment. Occasionally we get training, but it is generic and, at times, lacking any practicability. Some of the training is irrelevant because it does not capacitate us to deal with the challenges we face in the schools we lead.

That is why we have taken it upon ourselves to network and form a community where we support each other. There are three of us. We share our frustrations, support each other, and share strategies for our challenges. We are all novices, but I think that is our strength. We are willing to try new things and think out of the box. We set targets for our schools and devise plans to achieve them. By the time we present our plans to our respective schools, we know they have been critiqued, so we go there with solid proposals. Sometimes there are several deadlines, and you can forget. We remind and capacitate each other to perform some of the tasks we are given. That is how we survive. Even when making decisions, I ask for advice to ensure they align with policies. It makes me feel at ease when I can decide after consultation.

5.4.14 Looking at the Bigger Picture

I have to look at the bigger picture in all that I do. I am not harsh or strict, so I do not believe in that approach, but I am assertive when I have to be. The policies that the DBE prescribes are just there on paper. They do not serve our needs. Therefore, if it means I have to be flexible and bend the rules, I do that. I look at the bigger picture. My main priority is that quality teaching and learning is happening. For instance, the money we are allocated is insufficient to fulfil our needs. Therefore, things that the policy says we must pay for become a luxury. For example, giving teachers money to attend workshops is a luxury for us. They use their funds. I use my cash for petrol when I travel to the circuit and district offices. I do not claim. If we claim from this limited pool, by June, we will have no money left, and then we will have to borrow or find alternative means to make ends meet for the rest of the year.

We all make these sacrifices, so if it means turning a blind eye here and there, I do that. For example, if a teacher requests to leave early or asks to come a bit late, I will not ask them to take half-day leave. I know that teacher has sacrificed their weekend and their afternoons. Leading with an iron fist does not help schools in such contexts because teachers are doing beyond what they are paid to do.

5.4.15 Not Normalising the Abnormal

I am honest and transparent with the staff and learners alike. One of the things I always say is that we must not normalize an abnormal situation. An employer is obliged to provide the tools for working. If I look at other contexts, some of the issues I have mentioned are a non-issue. They have all the resources they need and can focus on the core business of teaching and learning.

The context constrains what we can do. No one should have to work beyond the stipulation of the school calendar, during the holidays, and so on. But that seems to be the norm in our schools. However, we must also not be consumed by the circumstances we find ourselves in. We must do our best to rise above them. We do it because we want to help our children and our communities.

While I serve my tenure, I want to change this. One day I want this school to be what a school ought to be. That is the legacy I would love to leave behind. I will pass through time, but the school will remain a beacon of hope and a place for new beginnings for all those rejected elsewhere.

5.5 Maqhinga's Journey: "The Teacher with an Office"

The name *Maqhinga* describes a person with tactical strategies. I have used it because, throughout his life, he has come up with various tactics and strategies to deal with the challenges he has faced. Maqhinga sees himself as a teacher with an office. His leadership repertoire is built on him focusing on teaching and learning, and the successes he gains there earn him the respect of those he leads.

5.5.1 A Child Born by a Child



I was told that my mother felt pregnant when she was in Grade 11. So, I was born by a child. For that reason, I do not judge young people who fall pregnant. All I see is me all over again. I was told it took my grandmother three months even to touch me. I think she felt betrayed that my mother had fallen pregnant. She was a hardworking woman and did not have my grandfather's support.

Perhaps she knew the pain of raising a child alone and had not wished that for her daughter.

5.5.2 My Pillar of Strength

When I was six, my mother got involved in a relationship and moved out, leaving me to be raised by my grandmother. My grandmother worked in the fields to put food on the table. She was my number-one cheerleader. We used to talk like we were buddies. She is the person that came to mind when you asked me about my mother. She was my everything.



5.5.3 The School Trip that Changed my Life

I knew we were not well off. My first school trip in Grade 2 confirmed this status. I had started attending the same school where my uncle's wife (uMalumekazi) was a teacher, so it was easy for me to be included in the trip because of her intervention. I was very excited about the trip. However, this was short-lived. We entered the bus, picked our seats, and everyone opened their lunch packs as soon as we were in transit. The smell of KFC filled the bus. Almost all the other learners had KFC for lunch. It had just opened at that time, so it was the in-thing. I



had never tasted it or seen it before. I had only seen the packaging when I took out trash from uMalumekazi's house.

I returned from the trip having not opened my lunch because I had ushatini (chutney) and jeqe (steamed bread), so I couldn't eat in front of everyone. You know what kids are like. I would have been the laughingstock for the whole day. So, I didn't eat. I had my lunch in a nearby bush on my way home. I was not even hungry, but I ate for two reasons. One was that I would not waste food because I knew it was scarce. The other was because I did not want my grandmother to feel less. I knew that was her best, and I was grateful.

That school trip changed my life. From that day onwards, I decided not to attend any school trips or participate in extra-curricular activities that had to do with entertainment, like Miss Valentine and the like. This was because these activities needed money, so I didn't want to place an additional burden on my grandmother. I lived up to this decision until I finished matric. Mind you, uMalumekazi was still at school. She would push me to go, but my grandmother supported me and told her that I had decided.

5.5.4 *Ngalufela ubala* (Undeserved Punishment)

We lived in a communal homestead with different homes. My aunt (my mother's younger sister) and her two children occupied one house. uMalumekazi (the teacher), my uncle, and their son lived in the other house. uMalumekazi was not fond of me, and I was well aware. I think it was because I was smarter than her son. She wished that her son was intelligent, but she also saw me as undeserving of being smart. To her, I was the illegitimate child abandoned by his mother. I knew she felt like this because she said it on various occasions. My awareness of uMalumekazi's dislike for me meant I always tried to be in her "good" books. This was a strategy to prevent unnecessary punishment. I also did this to get the small perks, like my cousin's hand me downs or the occasional opportunity to watch TV. Even though I manoeuvred around her, she always found ways and means to punish me—*ngangilufela ubala* (I was punished and victimized for things that were outside my control).

We had a herd of cattle at my actual home, where I lived with my grandmother. There were



also cows at uMalumekazi's place. My grandmother sold all our cattle. I did not mind herding the cattle for my grandmother, but it became a burden when our cows were sold, and I was still expected to herd uMalumekazi's cattle. I remember one day I woke up and decided not to herd them because uMalumekazi also had a son, and I felt he should do it. At school the next day, I got a hiding from uMalumekazi. My friends told me the hiding

I had received was not for the answer I had provided but for something else. I knew it was for the cows.

There were many other instances, but the worst was when she sabotaged me in Grade 4. There was a trend that you would skip a class if you were a top performer. In my school, it was done from Grade 4. Everyone knew it was going to be me. It was no secret. I was very excited because I would be moving to Grade 6. This did not happen, even though I had the top position in Grade 4. One teacher told me she was sorry, but uMalumekazi said it was not in my best interest and there was nothing they could do. When I got home and told my grandmother, she said I should not worry about it. I was still going to be okay. I stomached it. There was nothing I could do. The following year when I was doing Grade 5, uMalumekazi told my form teacher to ensure I was not in the top 10. I was number 36 in a class of 38. When I showed my grandmother, she said I should not worry because at least I had passed. Everyone knew I was in the top three and the marks had been manipulated, but no one did anything about it.

The way uMalumekazi treated me had a long-term impact on me. I find it challenging to make my feelings known when someone wrongs or hurts me. I avoid those kinds of confrontations even when I know I should say something. I assume that people are supposed to understand when they are hurting me or doing the wrong thing, even without me telling them. This emanated from the experiences I had, growing up. I always had to avoid hurting people or being on their "wrong" side, so I took time to understand what was right and wrong for a particular person so I could always be on their right. I had to exist silently and manoeuvre my every move so I wouldn't be a nuisance, and so I wouldn't be punished for merely existing.

5.5.5 Decade of Uncertainty

Life continued this way until my grandmother passed away. I was in Grade 9 when she passed on. I had been out in the fields, and she was lying on the floor when I returned. Instinctively

something told me it was the end for her. I had seen her deteriorating because of age and knew that this day would come sooner or later. Her passing was another point where I was confronted with a big decision about my life. With my grandmother gone, I no longer had a mother per se. She had been my everything. *Ngasengiyintandane* (I was an orphan).

After her passing, my life was full of instability and uncertainty. I decided to go to Greytown and live with my father and stepmother. I stayed with them for a year and realised it wasn't working for me. uMalumekazi's husband, my uncle, would see me and comment that I looked sickly. I had become thin and frail because of malnutrition. He asked me to move in with them, and I accepted the offer.

They had moved to Durban. When I arrived, he asked uMalumekazi to look for a school for me, but she said she couldn't find one. I ended up studying where she worked. The school was very far. We used to wake up at half past three to be at school on time. I was usually very sleepy for the first two periods because of waking up early and fatigue from travelling. Despite this, I managed to pass matric with an exemption. My cousin also did well. I used to help him with his work, and we studied together.

Years later, my cousin confessed that uMalumekazi had allowed me to stay with them because she knew I would help him. He also admitted that she had not looked for a school for me. She had thought that the distance and early mornings would affect my work negatively and give my cousin a chance to perform better than me. All of this came as no surprise to me.

My cousin and I discussed applying to the university during the school year. In the back of my mind, I knew it was impossible because I had no means to get the R120 for the application. So, when he applied, I did not. After matric, I took an offer to go to Johannesburg to live with my other uncle. I stayed with him for three years, but nothing of it. I came back to KZN to live with my father.

My aunt (my mom's sister) used to bump into my father, and he used to complain about me and tell her I was troublesome. I was not problematic. I was just misunderstood. My father perceived my behaviours as laziness and lack of interest. For instance, I was at his place when the matric results came out. The norm is that on the day the results are released, people run around and try to get the paper as early as possible. I did not do that because I did not have the money to buy the paper. I stayed home and later my neighbour told me he had seen my name. I thanked them and continued with my day, washing my father's car. In his observation, my

lack of excitement was because I feared I had failed. When I finally got the confirmation, he perceived my “disinterest” as a sign of laziness of not wanting to pursue my studies further.

He also compared me to my younger half-brother. He worked at the local supermarket during the holidays and on weekends. When he got home from work, he would be excited and constantly told me about the tips he was getting from teachers. One day I responded, unaware that he would go and tell my father. I told him that it was well and good for him to work there because he was still in Grade 11, and it was just a part-time job for him. In my case, it would be different. I told him I could go there, but the problem was that the teachers would get used to me working there. So, they will tip me for the first week or a month, and then I would be like all the other guys that work there. I know they would give me their spare change out of pity, saying that this young man was a good student. Look at what he has amounted to. He took that same story and told my father that he was helping me find work, but I was refusing. I then heard my father commenting when we passed each other in the corridors saying, “oh, so you don’t want to work at the supermarket.” That is another decision I had to make, to be a trolley guy or to be pestered for not wanting to work there.

My aunt got tired of my dad always complaining about me. She knew this was not the same boy who had grown up before her. She is the person who knows me. She called my father and asked him if I could come back home and live with her. I agreed.

5.5.6 Saving for my Future

I returned home and found a job as an assistant boilermaker on a six-month contract. After six months, I was promoted to boiler operator, and my contract was extended. I still felt a void. My colleagues were buying un-roadworthy second-hand cars, building outside bedrooms in their homes, and impregnating girls. I was happy



living at my grandmother’s house. I was unfulfilled and knew that I deserved better. We were earning about R1800, and with overtime, I could get up to R3000, but it was not enough.

At work, I met a friend with a similar vision. We decided to open savings accounts and save for our tertiary education. I couldn’t save a lot of money because I was helping my aunt fix the house. It was a mud house. In December, my friend was accepted at a tertiary institution. I continued working for another year and a half.

5.5.7 Risking it All

Around midyear, I had a substantial amount. I knew if I stayed on, there would always be an excuse to stay on further. I had to risk it all. I was convinced this was a calculated risk that would define who and what I became. I went to my father and told him I would leave work to pursue my studies. I also told my mom the same thing and asked if she could help me. She was a caregiver earning about R850 a month. She said she would try to give me R250 a month if that was the decision I wanted to make. This was the first time I would say my mother supported me. I went back to my dad and told him. He wasn't happy. He saw my decision as another sign of stupidity and laziness. He could not understand why I was leaving a paying job for a future without guarantees. He asked me about my plan of action. I told him the following:

I have saved R12 000. I will go wherever I am accepted and use this money to pay for what they need. I know it is not enough and will only last me for a semester. If I get results for the first semester and then get kicked out, I will frame them. When my children ask me why I wasn't like other fathers, I will show my children that this is where my money and *amandla ami* (my means) could take me up too. So that will be my degree.

He was bewildered and didn't even dignify me with a response. I put my plan into action, resigned, and left for Durban without his approval.

5.5.8 The Spring of my Life

Taking the risk was the best decision I made. When I arrived in Durban, I lived at my cousin's place (kwaMalumekazi). He was doing a BCom degree, and I wanted to do the same degree. Unfortunately, it was full. The only programmes that were available were the Bachelor of Education (BEd) and the Bachelor of Linguistics. I opted for the BEd.

Once the semester started, I got information about financial aid and how to get residence(res). I applied, and I was accepted. When I got res, I had about R7000 left. I decided to use the money that I had to buy a laptop. I didn't know how to use it, but I bought it anyway because I knew it was a good investment. After all, only two students had laptops, and I knew they were making money. It stayed in the box for over a month until Nkosi connected it and taught me how to use it. That is when I started making money. I would make CDs and sell them at res. I needed it because the R250 my mom was depositing for me was insufficient for food and stuff. That is how I entered the spring of my life, a season of new beginnings.

5.5.9 Ignoring the Noise

I was older, so I always got teased about this. One day we were en route to another university, and these guys were teasing me. They said, “you don’t have a problem with girls, but you don’t have a girlfriend, and you don’t even have a child, but you are not young. You want to be a grandfather and come to varsity to see your child.” I told them that you guys were asking the wrong way. You should ask if I’m married. From Grade 3 until I got to university, I always had it in my mind that I didn’t want to make another me. I was not bothered by the teasing. I had learned early in life to focus on myself. I dismissed it as harmless banter. I focused on all the good things that were happening to me.

5.5.10 The Illusion of Comfort

I had planned to switch programmes after my first year, but I was distracted by the comfort I was experiencing. For the first time in my life, I was one of those guys calling the shots in terms of making money and popularity. I had an eccentric look. I was good at sports and played for the school team, which I later captained. I was making money from my CD business. I was also House Com at some stage, so things were going well. That is what made me stay with the BEd. I got comfortable, and I forgot my initial goals.

5.5.11 The Family I Never had

Another source of comfort was falling in love. I met my wife at varsity. She is the first person to acknowledge my birthday and buy me a cake to celebrate it. I was unsure about my birthday when we met because I had two birth certificates. We just decided to choose one, and that is the one I have stuck with ever since. Since then, I have acknowledged the significance of birthdays, and I my kids will do the same because they have been socialised in this way.



I have four kids now, and they are my world. Family is very important to me because I did not have this growing up. It has given me a sense of purpose and a sense of belonging. Being a father has taught me many things, like being selfless, fair, honest, and unconditional love. As a father, I also do my best to protect and shield my kids from harm.



5.5.12 Healing my Scars



I have mostly forgiven some people who hurt me while growing up. It was for my healing, peace, and sanity. I was able to do this when I decided to become a Christian. I am grounded in values of love, kindness, compassion, forgiveness, honesty, fairness, and respect. These are the values I wanted my children to grow with and also live by. I grew up with no belief system, and upon reflection on all I had endured, I realised that there was a greater power that had always protected me. So, I decided to commit myself to follow Christ's teachings. It also helped that my wife is a Christian.

5.5.13 The Brotherhood that was Always There for Me

When I started my spiritual journey, I also realised that God had constantly given me friends to help me. All the friendships I have had developed organically. They have sustained me and empowered me in various ways. I have never told any of my friends about my circumstances, but they just did things that showed they somehow understood my situation. They are genuine people who never made me feel less. My friends are my brothers. Through their actions, I could see the goodness of people and the value of relationships. I learned to accept help, receive love, and be love. I realised that without people, you are nothing.

I traced this to my high school friend I met in Greytown while living with my father. While we



were sitting, he would disappear and come back with two quarter loaves of bread, one for me and one for himself. At varsity I had Sifiso, Nduduzo and Nkosi. We are like brothers now. They were my groomsmen when I got married. At the end of the term, I would stay behind, manoeuvring for DJs to be paid for the end-of-term bash. I would also get a cut from their payment, allowing me to travel back home and return at the beginning of the next term. I knew Sifiso always had my back when this didn't work out. He would stay behind with me and pay for me in the taxi so that I could get home. There was also Nduduzo. Whenever his mother brought groceries, he would share them with me. I also got that R250, and I had income from the CDs. But there were times when things were tough and would dry out. Nkosi is the guy who set up my laptop. That is how our friendship started. Meeting my brothers and wife made my time at university one of the best times of my life.

5.5.14 Maqhinga, the Teacher

Finding employment was relatively easy because various schools scouted me. I ended up working at Nduduzo's mom's school. It was a big school with a staff of approximately fifty teachers. At school, I experienced my first interaction with micro-politics and factions in the workplace. I learned very quickly not to involve myself. As a result, the principal was very fond of me. I was not good with the admin side of things. My file was not the best. My DH let it slide because she knew she would get As in Accounting, which the school had only started to achieve upon my arrival.

I was fortunate to find older colleagues who took me under their wing and nurtured me personally and professionally. They were family orientated and taught me about family and manhood. They also mentored me in terms of work. I still have a relationship with some of them, and they continue to be a valuable support structure in my growth.

Teaching was never my passion, but when I started, I realised I was positioned to help others and make a meaningful contribution to the learners I taught. This understanding gave me a self-worth I never had when growing up. Seeing the damage uMalumekazi had inflicted as a teacher, I wanted to be the opposite of everything she had been. I knew poverty, and I knew that education could be the tool that transformed the livelihoods of the learners. That knowledge is what has made me stay the course.

I had a plan when I started working. The goal was to work for six years and then apply for a promotion. However, after five years, I was promoted to DH at this school. Two years after my promotion, the principal resigned. The CES came and sat us down as the SMT and asked who we thought could act in her absentia. Unexpectedly, the DH senior to me raised my name, and I accepted. A year later, I applied for the principal position.

5.5.15 Changing my Mindset

Let me backtrack a bit to my tenure as DH. This school is the opposite of the one I worked in during my first appointment. My old school was well-resourced. It had a good track record and attracted the best learners because there was an entrance test before admission. This school had a trend of poor performance, with the last three years having results of 19%, 30%, and 40%, respectively.

I was appointed as the DH for Commerce. The duty load was done, and I was given Accounting and Business Studies. I asked the principal to reconsider the duty load allocation. The Accounting teacher was acting as the DH, the same position I had taken. I felt it would be a

double blow to lose the job and have to change their subject. She taught Accounting for years, and I know how Accounting and Maths teachers get attached to those subjects. The principal agreed to my request.

At the end of the term, we analysed the results. After the analysis, the principal reshuffled the duty loads. I took Accounting because it was an instruction. The learners failed in June and September. I told the teachers close to me that I have taught these learners to the best of my ability. The only thing that is left is to teach them to like me. I don't think they appreciated my statement because one of them said, "so you are saying they don't like us?"

When the trial exams came, the learners that were failing passed. I was unable to see this improvement. A friend of mine looked at my results and pointed this out. I had missed it because of ignorance and arrogance. I had taken the mentality of the As I was getting at my previous school and thought that this would also happen here. I had made it about me and forgot that the learners I was now teaching were different and needed a different approach. So, I needed to change my mindset and attitude.

After some self-reflection, I went back to the drawing board. I approached the principal and suggested that we have a staff imbizo. This was a first for the school. One of the things we had to admit, confront and dismantle was the false preconception that had been internalised of thinking that "*lezingane zanje*" (because of their circumstances, our learners are somehow less capable). The truth is that some teachers were demotivated and not putting in an effort. The schoolteachers had accepted that they were poor performing. I am saying this because they were not doing anything about the situation, and to not act, is to accept the status quo. The learners were also aware of this; they, too, were disinterested in the educational project.

We discussed our challenges and made short, medium, and long-term plans to improve the school's performance. It wasn't easy because some were not on board and thought I was saying they had not been doing enough. I ignored the noise and kept my focus. I met regularly with those in my department, and we modified our responses as we encountered new challenges and learned new lessons.

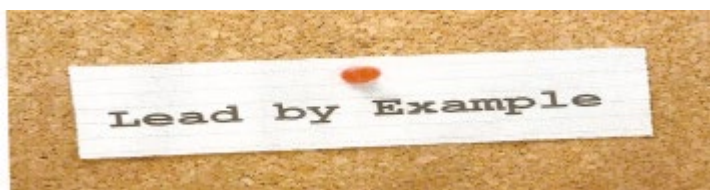
I cut many things off, so I could be more engaged with the learners through extra classes. In December, I achieved 80% in Accounting and 77% in Business Studies. The school got 74% from 30 something %. It was the highest they had ever achieved. Everyone was shocked at how we had been able to achieve this improvement. I think it's common sense that they wanted to point the praise to me, but then I pointed it back to them and said, "look, I only taught two

subjects. You taught the rest, so it's all of us." I'm assuming that this contributed to how they looked at me, and that is perhaps the reason why the senior DH recommended my name for the AP position. From that success, there was a change in the tone of the school for teachers and learners alike.

5.5.16 The Transitional Shock

When I served as the AP, we carried on trying to improve the results. We did not want to lose momentum. I was then appointed as the principal. All of a sudden, I was very anxious and uncertain. I lost some sleep. I can't explain it, but I can say that being an AP and being a principal is different. When I was appointed, the expectations of people increased. It's as if they expected me to be someone else—people I used to seek advice from suddenly expected that I had all the answers. I felt isolated, like I was no longer part of the team. I was pretty shocked. Being a principal did challenge me, and it continues to do so. I am still learning.

5.5.17 Leading by Example



I have never asked teachers to work on weekends, but a teacher teaches almost every Saturday. During these holidays, voluntarily, teachers

taught for two weeks. I was there because I also have subjects. I even came when I felt like I had done enough and I had done everything I needed to do with the learners. I was here.

I believe I am also dismantling some negative norms through my actions. Learners were writing an Accounting paper, and I realised there was litter in the front, so I took a broom and started sweeping. One older colleague saw me, and she was so angry. She marched to the class after the paper and commanded that all the girls must come and see her. I confronted her telling her that we must emulate the behaviours we expect and that cleaning was not the responsibility of girls only. We cannot preach cleanliness but not want to get our hands dirty. She still doesn't get it, though (*chuckles*). I also don't believe in those stereotypes, so I try to dismantle them through my actions. Maybe it's also the way I grew up. I am not used to having things done for me. I do what has to be done.

5.5.18 A Teacher with an Office

I still teach Accounting. The teacher who teaches Physics was very pessimistic. He was one of those who teach a subject but claimed learners are expected to fail it. It's a norm. I always tell my Accounting learners that we are aiming for a 100% pass rate. He has always perceived this

goal as overly ambitious, but this has changed over time. In one meeting, he said, “Maqhinga says he wants 100% for Accounting, and he is not even at school sometimes, then we can’t have an excuse of our learners not passing.”

We have a collegial relationship with the staff. I see myself as a teacher with an office. I don’t know if I feel like this because we are a small school and I also teach or because we are here for a common purpose: to teach our learners. I believe in getting respect because of my deeds and acts of service, not my title.

5.5.19 Asserting Myself in an Unconventional Way

My way of doing things has been effective in influencing a culture of excellence in teaching and learning. However, there are instances where I know I should be assertive. I somehow expect people to know when they are doing something wrong. We are adults and professionals, after all. Recently teachers left early. It was exam time. This was despite a collective agreement that we would use the time for marking so that they could be relieved during the holidays. For some strange reason, they decided to leave early on that day. I stepped out of my office and saw the transport collecting them.

I’m not a confrontational person. The next day, I greeted them and said, “*sanibona, ninjani, ayisazani. Ilokhu singcinene izolo, kombe bekuyisikhathisini?*” (Hi, how are you? I last saw you’ll yesterday. What time was it, by the way?) From me saying that I believed I had conveyed the message that their behaviour was not acceptable. That was the last day an incident like that happened. I unconventionally assert myself.

5.5.20 A Culture of Collaboration

I am never one to work alone. I do not make some decisions that I take. I find out from other principals like Ubuntu. He has been a principal for a shorter period, but he has worked in this area for longer, so he understands the dynamics. He is also older than me, so I make phone calls and ask how I should do things because I think I will lose the plot if I rely only on myself.

I use the same approach with the staff. We work collectively and collaboratively. I am not a jack of all trades, so I need their skills and input. As I said, I am a teacher with an office, so in the same spirit, when someone is leading, I give them the space to do that. I also don’t have all the answers and solutions to our challenges. We engage on issues as a collective. This has helped because we must all be accountable for our decisions.

I think all that I do is driven by building positive relationships. If relationships are sorted, the chances are that the rest will be in place. Relationships are sacred to me. I am a relationship builder. Because of the forged relationships, teachers are teaching and going the extra mile. We have team buildings to connect as people. We now understand each other even more.

5.5.21 Being Realistic about What can be Done

I have learned and accepted that we cannot achieve all we want simultaneously. I have had to be honest and realistic about my expectations and what we can achieve. Everyone is placing demands. One person is asking about the overgrown grass. The other is asking why the school is not painted. Another is asking why we are not getting sponsors or partnerships. All these demands are placed on me. All these are important, but some issues are pressing, like quality teaching and learning, and others will take time. But then it comes with the victories as well. If learners in the school are passing, they will still look at you, so you need to take both sides of the coin. So, challenges and expectations are many.

5.5.22 Understanding the Society in which we Live

Sometimes we magnify things that are non-issues. I don't exaggerate the issue of discipline. We do have kids that are unruly and ill-disciplined. It is understandable. They are kids, so you can't be angry at a child for being a child. The sad reality is that most learners come from "broken" families. Some have never been taught discipline. We cannot crucify them for that. All we can do is instil discipline.

We have a high prevalence of teenage pregnancy. When I see a pregnant learner, I tell the teachers, "that is me in that stomach." Sometimes when we get to certain levels of life, we tend to shift from reality and act as if the things that are happening now are new when in essence, they have been happening even all along and, at some point, were part of them, and we are even results of them. The school is part of the broader society. We must accept this and try our best to change society by positively influencing the learners to make better choices. Unfortunately, this is my personal view on these issues. Other teachers don't see things the way I do. They focus on these at the expense of teaching and learning.

Issues like community protests and public transport strikes result in losing instructional time. For example, last year, we had an incident where we could not come to school for over two weeks due to a public transport strike and a fight over routes in the area. As a result, a lot of teaching and learning time was lost. This is not an isolated event. These are some of the realities of our community, most of which are beyond our control. Our kids rely on school nutrition. If

there are glitches, you find that we have to knock off early. Sometimes these glitches are because the service provider fails to deliver as expected. We do what we can to navigate them.

5.5.23 “The Three in One”: The Principal, the Man, and the Father

I am many things to our learners. Maybe it is because I am honest about who I am, where I come from, and what I wish and want from them. I think they can relate to me. I remember a girl who came to me and told me she had a boil in her thigh near her vaginal area. When the female teachers asked her what was wrong, she told them she had told me about it. They were livid. For them, that kind of information should not be discussed with a male. To me, she is a child. It doesn't matter. The same applies to the teachers. They come and tell me about heavy personal challenges because they can trust me.

This school is not easy on the eye, but it is home, where there is warmth, acceptance, and a sense of belonging. We assist learners with bursary applications and applications to the Central Applications Office (CAO), even to the extent of paying for some from our own pockets if we cannot source funding. We have sought sponsorship to allow our learners the opportunity to attend career expos. So, while teachers may exhibit behaviours and attitudes that I find toxic at times, I know they love the learners and have their best interest at heart.

5.5.24 I am Evolving

Being in this school is positively shaping me. I am evolving. I now understand that context matters in all aspects. Before, I would quickly jump to a conclusion if a teacher said learners did not understand them. This is because I was in a school with an entrance test, and we only took the cream of the crop. Here we accept any child with a report. We need those numbers to ensure that PPN is covered and the teachers' posts are secured.

Before we can even worry about As, we need to concern ourselves with their self-esteem and confidence to make them believe they can pass. Some have been told they will never amount to anything. They are like “rejects”, so to speak, so we first need to help them unlearn that and make them believe they are just as capable. This environment has helped me think differently. All I'm bringing to the table is my personality and myself, and I am assisting people in seeing that wherever you are, it is possible. We do our best to expose learners to different opportunities. We are trying to restore hope and bring about change.

5.5.25 Teaching and Learning at the Centre

I do not believe we have to reinvent the wheel. All I know is we have to ensure quality teaching and learning. This was how we approached our turnaround strategy. We sat down as the staff

and looked at our expertise. We then allocated teachers accordingly. Some teachers were stuck with subjects they did not know, negatively impacting the learners' educational experience and outcomes. Every year we plan for the following year. We factor in the extra-curricular activities, so they do not take away from instructional time. We analyse our results every term and use the analysis to inform what we do next. We have paired with Ubuntu's school. The teachers have professional development workshops and set joint assessments. We have positive staff relations based on values of respect and professionalism. All we are doing is what we have to do. We are going back to basics.

5.5.26 Looking Ahead

The school is still improving. This year we were number one in the circuit. The goal is a 100% matric pass rate, and then we are targeting to be number one in the District. In my first address as the principal, I said the following:

I have a dream. I dream that if a subject advisor is sitting in their office and thinking about Accounting teachers in the District, which has about 300 schools, I wouldn't want them not to mention me in the top 5. Let us stop seeing ourselves as less capable. Let us forget about ex-Model C schools. The teachers in those schools are exactly like us. We studied at the same university. We teach the same Business Studies and Accounting. The only difference is the buildings they are in. It is possible to get As and perform the way they do.

That is not to say we are oblivious to the challenges. That means we must think in new ways and develop suitable responses. In the team buildings I was talking about, we have realised that most of us are the product of schools similar to ours. We have learned about our diverse backgrounds, similar to our learners. That means the systemic challenges we are now teaching under have long existed. We cannot say we will start thriving for excellence once we have resources; that day may never come. We know this is not how it should be, but we cannot afford to be consumed by that.

Last year our Economics teacher got an award for being number one in the district. So, it tells me that the motivation is working. Once you have tasted the victory, you also want to keep it, so she is pushing again. Others are also following suit. That is our focus. That is what is driving us. We want to be part of the conversation. If you are talking about our district or circuit, we should be part of the discussion in a positive way.

5.6 Captains' Emergent Identities

This section presents the emergent identities of novice principals. I derived these identities from analyzing the principals' stories and experiences. Guiding this was the notion that identities are attached to life experiences, and each individual has multiple identities (Clapp-Smith et al., 2019; Hallinger, 2018; Kwok et al., 2018; Moorosi & Grant, 2018). I looked at the experiences before and during the principal's tenures and considered their leadership repertoire. Drawing on these, I then came up with the emergent identities below to respond to research puzzle one and answer the question, "*Who are novice principals leading schools in the context of deprivation?*" The novice principals' identities are presented below, after which I used an example to illustrate the connection between the plot and the emergent identity.

5.6.1 Mholi'S Emergent Identities

A Natural-born Leader	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A Childhood of Strife • The Struggles of Transitioning into University Life
A Servant Leader	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learning Leadership through Observation and Practice • Umuntu Ngumuntu Ngabantu • Ngiwumuntu We Sizwe
A Strategic Leader	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learning Leadership through Observation and Practice • Being a Team Player
An Ethical Leader	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Umuntu Ngumuntu Ngabantu • Ngiwumuntu We Sizwe • Learning Leadership through Observation and Practice
Mr. Intrinsically Motivated	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A Childhood of Strife
A Nurturer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Umuntu Ngumuntu Ngabantu • The Struggles of Transitioning into University Life • Being Appealing to my Audience
A Mediator	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Struggles of Transitioning into University Life
A Change Agent	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A Place of Refuge • Learning Leadership through Observation and Practice • Ngiwumuntu We Sizwe • My Experience as a Teacher

A Father	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A Place of Refuge
An Influencer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learning Leadership through Observation and Practice
A Straight Talker	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A Childhood of Strife
A Discerning Leader	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Setting Clear Directives
A Resilient Leader	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A Childhood of Strife • The Struggles of Transitioning into University Life
A God-Guided Leader	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A Place of Refuge • Being Appealing to my Audience
A Context-Focused Leader	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A Place of Refuge

The table above illustrates Mholi's emergent identities. Drawing on one example, I will demonstrate how I arrived at the emergent identity. In the plot "A place of refuge," Mholi shared that his teachers were agents of change and transformational leaders. These early impartations and experiences made him desire to become a teacher. They also implanted in him a sense of wanting to be the kind of teacher who brings about transformation and positively shapes the spaces he occupies.

As demonstrated in his story, Mholi embodied this identity of being a change agent, shaping his professional career even before becoming a principal. He stated that he provided a holistic educational experience by not only focusing on the content he taught but also teaching his learners valuable life lessons that would motivate and enable them to dream beyond the circumstances of their livelihoods. As a principal, leading as a change agent is also evident in his leadership. Mholi stated that he is intrinsically driven by the belief that teachers are not just teachers but are activists, and activism is about inspiring hope and bringing about transformation, which is what he also thrives on doing in his school and community.

5.6.2 Ntozinhle's Emergent Identities

An Ethical Leader	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • My Family are my Roots • Life at the Convent
A Mothering Leader	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • My Family are my Roots
A Compassionate Leader	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Context Demands that I be an All-Rounder

A Servant Leader	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I am my Mothers Daughter • The Context Demands that I be an All-Rounder
A Selfless Individual	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • My Family are my Roots • I am my Mothers Daughter • My Early Life Hurdles
A Team Player	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • My Family are my Roots • My Early Life Hurdles • An Unexpected Turn
Sister Patience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • My Early Life Hurdles • Life at the Convent
An Assertive Leader	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Sister: A Curious Case • Taking Charge and Asserting my Authority
A Decisive Leader	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Taking a Path Less Travelled • Seasonal Waves of Doubt • Taking Charge and Asserting my Authority
A God-Guided Individual	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Taking a Path Less Travelled • My Steps are Ordered • Walking the Talk
A Forward Thinker	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • My family are my roots
A Resilient Individual	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Taking a Path Less Travelled • Life at the Convent • The Sister: A Curious Case • Seasonal Waves of Doubt • D-Day • An Unexpected Turn
A Holistic Leader	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I am my Mothers Daughter • The Context Demands that I be an All-Rounder
A Context-Focused Leader	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • My Family are my Roots • My Early Life Hurdles

Ntozinhle's multiple identities are shown above. She shared her upbringing of growing up in a loving family who, even though they were not well off financially, had a home filled with joy and were not consumed by the challenging financial situation. We learn this from the plot "My family is my roots." In her leadership, Ntozinhle emphasizes love and care by giving and being love to her learners. Amongst other ways, she enacts this by being an all-rounder. She stated that she is a police officer, a nurse, a social worker, a cooker, and a kitchen girl. All of these illustrate the identity of being a mothering leader. Additionally, evidencing the embodiment of

being a mother, she shares how her learners will come to her and hug her. She responds by giving them affection because she understands that is what they seek through this action.

5.6.3 Ubuntu's Emergent Identities

An Ethical Leader	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • My Home was the Village
A Servant Leader	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Matriarch: My Strong Tower • Life at the College • My Newness as a Gift
A Managerial Leader	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Boy who had to become a Man • Paying through Service
A Selfless Individual	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Boy who had to become a Man • Going an Extra Mile
An Influencer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Choosing the Right Path • Paying through Service • Ascending the Ranks • Going an Extra Mile
Mr. Passionate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Life at the College • Passion is my fuel
A Teachable Leader	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • My Home was the Village • The Matriarch: My Strong Tower • Investing in my Professional Development
An Assertive Leader	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Matriarch: My Strong Tower
A Decisive Leader	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Matriarch: My Strong Tower
A Team Player	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Boy who had to become a Man
A Father	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Boy who had to become a Man • Creating a Culture of Sisterhood and Brotherhood
A Forward Thinker	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Choosing the Right Path • The Matriarch: My Strong Tower • Looking at the Bigger Picture
A Resilient Individual	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Matriarch: My Strong Tower • Not Normalising the Abnormal
Mr. Adaptable	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Boy who had to become a Man • Paying through Service • Life at the College • Being Invisible and Visible

Amongst the multiple emergent identities provided above, one of Ubuntu's emergent identities is an influencer. From a young age, in the plot "My home was the village," Ubuntu observed his elders at his family home and learned behaviours and attitudes which influenced his character. Later on, Ubuntu demonstrated and personified being an influencer by first choosing the path to complete his matric, leaning on the understanding that his choice would impact his siblings, setting the precedence that failure is not the end of the world. As a teacher, he also led change by taking the initiative in modernising ways of doing under challenging circumstances and resistance. The influencer identity is also pronounced in his leadership. Influencers are pioneers of new things. Ubuntu stated that whenever they try new things, they become novices. Though met with resistance by others, this attitude propelled him to push the boundaries and disrupt the status quo, resulting in improved results quickly.

5.6.4 Maqhing's Emergent Identities

An Ethical Leader	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A Child born by a Child • My Pillar of Strength • Ngalufela Ubala • The Family I never had • Healing my Scars • The Brotherhood that was always there for Me
A Servant Leader	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • My Pillar of Strength • Ngalufela Ubala • The Family I never had • Healing my Scars • The Brotherhood that was always there for Me
An Influencer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • My Pillar of Strength • The Spring of my Life • Healing my Scars • Changing my Mindset
Mr. Selfless	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • My Pillar of Strength • Healing my Scars • The Brotherhood that was always there for Me • Maqhing, The Teacher
A Teacher at Heart	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maqhing, The Teacher
A Relationship Builder	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Healing my Scars • The Brotherhood that was always there for Me
A Father	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A Child born by a Child • Maqhing, The Teacher

Mr. Focused	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Saving for my Future
A People Pleaser	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ngalufela Ubala
Mr. Decisive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The School Trip that Changed my Life • The Spring of my Life • Saving for my Future • Risking It All
A Self-Reflexive Practioner	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Illusion of Comfort • The Brotherhood that was always there for Me • Changing my Mindset
A Forward Thinker	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The School Trip that Changed my Life • A Decade of Uncertainty • Saving for my Future • Risking it All • Maqhinga, The Teacher
Mr. Resilient	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ngalufela Ubala • A Decade of Uncertainty • Saving for my Future • Risking it All • Ignoring the Noise
A Team Player	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Brotherhood that was always there for Me • Changing my Mindset
A Flexible	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Spring of my Life • Changing my Mindset
A God-Guided Individual	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Healing my Scars • The Family I never had • The Brotherhood that was always there for me
A Context-Focused Leader	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The School Trip that Changed my Life

One of Maqhinga's emergent identities is being a relationship builder. Having had a strained relationship in his early life with his father, mother, and aunt (uMalumekazi), later in his life at university, in the plot "The brotherhood that was always there for me," Maqhinga reflected on how organically formed relationships had taught him the significance of relationships. He also shared how they aided him in receiving love, accepting help, and reciprocating these actions. In his leadership, he enacts this identity by building positive relationships with all stakeholders in the school community. He further extends this by being a father, a brother, a teacher, a confidant, and a friend. All these illustrate an embodiment of being a relationship

builder, as all these identities require elements of selflessness, trust, love, and respect, all of which are essential to building relationships.

5.7 Chapter Conclusion

This chapter has presented the novice principals' restoried narratives created through analysis. The presented narratives have detailed the novice principals' journey before and during their tenure. Each of the novice principal's stories are presented in different plots detailing the novice principal's journey before and during their tenure. After the stories, the chapter provided the novice principals emergent identities, responding to the research puzzle, "*Who are novice principals leading schools in the context of deprivation?*" In these figures, I have attempted to align the plot akin to the experience from which the identity emerges. Lastly, I have drawn on one identity through a brief discussion to illustrate the connections between the experience, the emergent identity, and leadership practice. The following section responds to research puzzle two and details the novice principal's leadership practices.

CHAPTER SIX

CAPTAINING THE BRIDGE: LEADERSHIP PRACTICES OF NOVICE PRINCIPALS

6.1 Introduction

The study set out to understand the lived experiences of novice principals leading schools in a deprived context. In the previous chapter, I presented the principals' stories responding to research puzzle one. This chapter responds to research puzzle two, asking, "*how do novice principals leading schools in the context of deprivation enact leadership?*" It explains how the principals lead their schools, that is, how they captain the bridge. The bridge is the room from which the captain commands the vessel.

Through the analysis of narratives, it emerged that novice principals used multiple leadership practices to captain the bridge and lead their schools. These practices are presented through seven themes. The first discussion focuses on building relationships through an integrated approach. This is followed by the second theme, titled strengthening the instructional core, in which principals explain the various strategies they use to improve teaching and learning. The third theme illustrates how the principals lead by example. The chapter then discusses how the principals wear many hats to navigate the unknown terrain of leading in a deprived school context. The themes leading beyond policy and leading with the context in mind are discussed consecutively as themes five and six. The last theme is a leadership of care, after which I will conclude the chapter.

6.2 Building Relationships through an Integrated Approach

Relationship building through an integrated approach emerged as a recurring theme as one of the approaches novice principals used to enact leadership. The principals were intentional about what they were doing, such that the process served as a platform and means to cultivate positive staff relations. Adopting an open-door policy and collaborating with others emerged as the main drivers of building relationships in this study.

6.2.1 Adopting an Open-Door Policy

The principals wanted to build relationships. As part of that, they understood that they had to be accessible to all stakeholders and create a space for engagement and dialogue. Accessibility was achieved by promoting an open-door policy. Open-door policy refers to practices that encourage accessibility, transparency, and overall openness in all matters between stakeholders

and school leadership (Klein, 2012). In this study, the open-door policy further describes the principals' literally opening up their offices so stakeholders could come in and engage with the principal on different school issues.

As evidence of this, Ntozinhle shares below what she did when she arrived at the school:

When I arrived, I was honest and transparent about my intentions. I adopted an open-door policy. I opened the office and communicated to all stakeholders (learners, parents, teachers, etc.) that I was here to serve and wanted them to engage with me. I told them that the chairs here were for them to occupy. If they do not come to my office, there is no need to be here.

Similarly, Mholi explained how he set the tone on his arrival:

I was transparent about my intentions and vision for the school when I was appointed. I have an open-door policy if they (the teachers) have requests. They can come to me. Because of this, if a person comes to me and perhaps asks to go somewhere, I will allow them. In that way, they know they will not return again unless it is for a legitimate reason.

Ubuntu used the open-door policy to obtain valuable information from learners (see Creating a culture of sisterhood and brotherhood, 5.4.10). He explicated: *"This (information about learner challenges) is the kind of information I get from having an open-door policy and communicating with the learners."*

Maqhinga did not explicitly mention having an open-door policy but that his office was respected. However, this did not result in communication barriers. Instead, there were collegial relationships, and communication was easy to flow between staff and learners (see A teacher with an office, 5.5.18). Maqhinga mentioned the school's small size as another possible explanation for this collegiality and easy communication flow. Even though Maqhinga was not explicit about the open-door policy, the easy communication flow could be associated with the ability to be accessible, also found in other principals.

These findings align with Wieczorek and Manard (2018), who report on novice principals in rural contexts. The results of this study indicate that the NPs focused on building relationships and shaping the school culture by opening a safe space for communication, being accessible, and having open-door policies applicable to parents, learners, and teachers alike (Wieczorek & Manard, 2018).

In another study investigating the role of organisational transparency, Klein (2012) found that transparency, initiated and encouraged by the open-door policy in this study, is significant in shaping commitment to work. Providing staff with space to engage with leaders promotes an egalitarian status, strengthens relationships, and influences staff to pursue organisational goals (Klein, 2012). While there may be other possible explanations for the principals' stance on adopting an open-door policy, the benefits, as explained by Klein (2012), may be offered as a possible rationale for this approach. As shown in the upcoming discussions, this approach does yield positive benefits as the principals can obtain valuable information about their school. It is this information that shapes further actions for school improvement initiatives. Beyond the open-door policy, the principals collaborated with others to build relations.

6.2.2 Collaborating with Others

Collaborating with others is another approach principals used to build relationships. The principals collaborated with multiple stakeholders within and beyond the school premises, such as teachers, the SGB, and the broader parent community within the school. Beyond the school, they collaborated with the business community, like the taxi associations and other principals with whom they had established critical friendships. Internally, amongst staff, significant attributes of these collaborations were participation in decision-making, with principals taking a follower role when others lead.

Emphasising this approach to enacting leadership in a deprived context as a novice principal, Ntozinhle foregrounded not only working with people but also working for people. *"I am not here to run a one-woman show. I work for people and with people."*

A similar posture to leadership was stated by Ubuntu, which rejected the silo-mentality to leadership.

I am not a lone ranger. We work as a team to ensure that our school is running. I work with the staff, other external organizations, and stakeholders to support the learners. I am grateful that the team shares a similar vision.

Maqhinga and Mholi shared similar assertions. They indicated working collectively and collaboratively with others. *"We work collectively and collaboratively. We also engage on issues as a collective."* (Maqhinga). Mholi stated, *"While we are trying to mend the broken relationships, we are simultaneously trying to rebuild the culture of collaboration."*

He further illustrated one of the ways he had implemented this collaborative approach.

We had various staff sessions where we created a new vision and mission. We revised school policies and rebranded the school for its new era. I encouraged participation, and we had robust discussions and disagreements. I gave the teachers something they had been yearning for, the opportunity to voice themselves and the platform to participate in the issues close to them.

Ubuntu and Maqhinga further expressed switching their roles from leaders to becoming followers as an element of collaboration. Stating this, they said:

I have learned that as much as I may draw from the capabilities and skills of others and as much as I may work with others, I must ensure we have an environment with a culture of collaboration. I do this by giving people the space and opportunity to use their talents and trusting them to make decisions. I, therefore, take a follower role at times when those with talents and skills lead. (Ubuntu)

I am never one to work alone. As I said, I am a teacher with an office, so in the same spirit, when someone is leading something, I give them the space to do that. (Maqhinga)

Mholi was not specific about being a follower, but his leadership repertoire has tenets of collaboration. His voice is presented below:

I am not the kind of person who micro-manages people. I believe that we have gotten to a stage where we know what we are here to do. So, I give teachers the space to do that. Giving them autonomy is a way of showing that I trust them. I provide them with the freedom to participate in their children's education. When we have special days, like cultural days, I involve them in passing our heritage to the learners. There are many other ways we include parents. They trust us, and they want to work with us. I also have a strong SGB who supports us in what we do.

Unlike the other principals, the parent component in Mholi's school seemed to be taking a keen interest in schooling, despite some challenges elaborated on in Chapter seven.

The other day one of my colleagues was telling me that the parents were talking about me, saying that they thought I was a child, a boy, but now they know and acknowledge that this is a man. When I call parents meeting, you would swear that it is a payment of the grant because it is so full (*chuckles*). The parents come in numbers, and they respect me. They realise that I am committed to my work.

The principals' actions, working with and for people, allowing oneself to follow, and reciprocal communication have an affinity with servant leadership, an approach characterised by

listening, stewardship, commitment to the growth of people, placing value on people, and community-building, to mention a few (Spears, 2010). Dennis et al. (2010) describe servant leaders as those who serve with a strong focus on the followers. Previous studies (Bhengu & Mkhize, 2018; Chikoko et al., 2015; Maringe et al., 2015) have also found that principals leading in deprived schools enact servant leadership. In particular, Mholi inviting staff to participate in creating the vision and mission is symbolic of care and value of people's opinions, principles consistent with servant leadership (Bhengu & Mkhize, 2018). Maqhinga and Ubuntu's role reversal as followers is also an indicator of servant leadership, highlighting the ability to trust others, listen to them, and work with and for them (Chikoko et al., 2015). The difference between these studies and the current one is that the principals using servant leadership in schools located in a deprived context were not novice principals. From this, it can be assumed that there may be practices common to both seasoned and novice principals.

Two principals (Ubuntu and Maqhinga) also collaborated by establishing a critical friendship. According to Swaffield (2007), a critical friendship is a collaborative, supportive, and challenging relationship between professionals. Ubuntu explained this friendship and the composition of its members:

I balance my efforts of capacitating those I lead by also capacitating myself. I do this by investing in my professional development. That is why we have taken it upon ourselves to network and form a community to support each other. There are three of us. We share our frustrations, support each other, and share strategies for our challenges. We are all novices but I think that is our strength. We are willing to try new things and think out of the box.

These two further shared how they used this friendship to navigate leadership, gain support and aid their learning. They stated:

Some decisions that I make are not taken by myself. I try to find out from other principals like Ubuntu. He has been a principal for a shorter period, but he has worked in this area for longer. He understands the contextual dynamics. He is also older than me, so I make phone calls and ask how I should do things because I think I will lose the plot if I rely on myself and do something out of my judgment. (Maqhinga)

We set targets for our schools and devise plans to achieve them. Sometimes there are several deadlines, and you can forget. So we check up on each other, remind each other about deadlines, and capacitate each other to perform the given tasks. Even when making decisions, I can ask them for advice to ensure they align with policies. By the time we present our plans to our respective schools, we know we have critiqued them and seen

shortcomings, so we go there with solid proposals. It also makes me feel at ease when I can decide after consultation. That is how we survive. (Ubuntu)

As mentioned above, the principals' relationship demonstrates characteristics consistent with critical friendship. It is collaborative and supportive because it provides feedback and a different lens for one's practice and ideas (Ainscow & Southworth, 1996). It is challenging because, by its nature, constructive critique is uncomfortable yet enhancing, such that one may learn and unlearn, which would otherwise not be possible (Fletcher et al., 2016). The principals share such gains, stating that critical friendships allow them to share their ideas and receive constructive criticism. Such feedback is essential as novice principals are still at a phase where they are attempting to establish their legitimacy as school leaders (Spillane et al., 2015), and making sound decisions is one of the ways they can gain this legitimacy.

Maqhinga further mentioned that they had initiated an initiative to assist other novices appointed in the area. At the time, this had not taken off. However, this is what he stated:

As critical friends, we have initiated an extension of this support system to assist those coming after us. There is a novice principal who has been recently appointed. I called him and told him to contact me once he gets his letter so we can talk about things he should prepare for and other related things to the position. We are doing this so he does not walk alone.

On the other hand, Ntozinhle (see *Learning to swim in the ocean*, p. 99) seeks guidance from a mentor to aid her learning. She said the following:

My mentor would come during the break as if she was coming for tea. She would teach me during this time. Whenever I was stuck, I called, and she assisted. Even when they came to ask to test me, I always tried to be a step ahead so they would not know that I did not know. I would quickly call her, get an explanation, and revert to the query. (Ntozinhle)

Mentoring can take various forms. In Ntozinhle's case, it was a self-initiated relationship between herself and an experienced principal of the neighbouring school. She sought the relationship to gain support, advice, and guidance; coaching in school administration; communicating important and sometimes privileged information; and extending protection for herself (Jacobi, 1991; Ragins & Verbos, 2007 as cited in Hayes, 2019). Like Maqhinga and Mholi, such support was essential to legitimise Ntozinhle's leadership, even more so because she had no prior leadership experience.

The collaborations extended beyond the school walls. For example, Mholi explained how he collaborated with one known big broadcasting company:

Last year I organized the SABC to come to the school. I also invited one of the Idols contestants to visit the school. We try our best to expose them to things to dream big.

Similarly, Ubuntu mentioned multiple stakeholders, including alumni, general community members, and businesses. He also mentioned how these collaborations were facilitated and some outcomes achieved:

We invite ex-learners who have succeeded to share their stories. We have to make them dream bigger than their circumstances. Most recently, I have tried to get the community on board. I approached the local businesses and the taxi association to partner with the school to get more resources and alliances. I approached them with the SGB to have a sense of ownership because they relegated most of their duties to me. This has helped because I see the SGB members working autonomously and following up. We have received some support from some of the businesses we have approached, which has been very uplifting. Even when learners are stuck for transport, the taxi association is always there to help us.

Collaborating with the taxi association yielded additional benefits for Ubuntu. He mentioned that this enabled the school to extend the day because they could arrange transport for learners, which would have been impossible if the school had not had such a relationship with the association:

When we extend the school day, we must ensure that we make arrangements, so learners and teachers can get transport to go home. We can now do this because of our partnership with the association. We notify them to change the pick-up time when we have the extra classes.

Emerging from these narratives is that these collaborations are also foregrounded a distributed leadership approach. This approach emphasizes formal and informal leadership at multiple levels (Jones et al., 2014; Spillane et al., 2006). As a result, different people can lead depending on the task or context (Gronn, 2002). Distributed leadership cultivates a sense of shared purpose, collaboration, and ownership (Harris, 2013).

In Chikoko et al. (2015), one of the seasoned principals leading a school in a deprived context reported roping in the leadership of the Representative Council of Learners (RCL) and School Management Team (SMT) members to work together to monitor the afternoon study periods.

In his efforts to turn the tide of a dysfunctional school, another seasoned principal worked closely with the School Governing Body (SGB) chairperson (Naicker, 2018). These examples illustrate that leadership can be widely distributed amongst various stakeholders. Additionally, collaborating with others, whether through serving, distributing leadership, or other means is a foundation for building relationships and school-community partnerships.

Bauch (2001) defines school-community partnerships as “a set of social relationships within and between the school and its local community that promote action” (p. 208). They require connections fostered through collaborative efforts premised on mutual trust, care, and opportunities for reciprocal engagements between partners (Bauch, 2001), as in this study. Epstein (2011) alludes that school-community partnerships play a significant role in improving dysfunctional schools. Recent evidence suggests that principals in deprived schools have endeavoured to create and sustain school-community partnerships, using them as one of the tools to improve their schools (Dzimiri, 2018, Myende, 2018; Naicker, 2018).

Ubuntu elaborated that there were instances where giving people to lead did not yield the desired results. He took cases as learning opportunities to provoke reflexivity and guide learning.

Sometimes they make mistakes, or the intended outcomes are not achieved. It is not the end of the world. Out of those mistakes, they are learning. We will look at the course of action taken and see what we can do better next time. If I do not trust them and do not allow them to take the initiative and develop ideas, I will not know what they are good at and how good they are.

As he did with staff, Ubuntu expected the same leeway when he faltered. Ubuntu voiced how he did not view himself with a grander lens just because of his position. He was aware of his shortcomings and took responsibility when he made mistakes.

Just because I am a principal does not mean I am perfect. I make mistakes. I falter. I must be able to acknowledge them and make them right. People reciprocate what you give out. You attract the same energy you give.

Hallinger and Heck (2010) posit that a focus on people is a form of capacity building in organisations, which may explain the principals’ approach. These relationships and partnerships built through collaboration are fundamental to building the social capital needed to lead 21st-century schools (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2013; Harris, 2003), especially those in deprived contexts, given the multiple challenges faced.

Relationship building is also an intricate process requiring different ways to nurture social connections. The experiences shared by novice principals suggest that they possess certain wisdom about the significance of relationships and the complexity of building them, so the process serves as a means to solidify the relationships. There is an emphasis on trust, care, communication, power-sharing, and creating a nurturing environment where all stakeholders are valued, given significant opportunities to participate, and supported (Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993). The power-sharing illustrated by the principals demonstrates that they trust those in their community and view them as assets (Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993).

Moreover, the principals' practices explained above also indicate leadership foregrounded in the *Ubuntu* philosophy. This African philosophy emphasizes interconnectedness in human relations, interdependence, and community (Fox, 2010; Ncube, 2010; Nzimakwe, 2014). In this study, *Ubuntu*-guided leadership is demonstrated not only by the focus on relationships themselves but also through principals' traditions of consultation and participation in decision-making through collaborations; emphasis on consensus and agreement; respect and trust of individuals to lead and be led; and a general desire to positively sustain the well-being of external and internal school community (Fox, 2010; Ncube, 2010; Nzimakwe, 2014).

Through building relationships using an integrated approach, the principals can create social connections, understand their school context, and use these understandings to inform actions to improve teaching and learning and strengthen the instructional core, as discussed in the following theme.

6.3 Strengthening the Instructional Core

The accounts provided by novice principals suggested that building relationships had multiple effects. Ultimately, though placing a high value on relationships, the novice principals wanted to improve teaching and learning and strengthen the instructional core. They, however, understood that people were essential for such improvements. According to Anderson (2010), focusing on the instructional core includes structured interventions that promote support; supervision; monitoring learning, and ensuring that teachers are focused on teaching and learning to improve classroom instruction.

In this study, the principals used indirect means. Indirect means are what other scholars (Hallinger & Heck, 1996; Leithwood et al., 2010) term the "leadership focus" and explain it as the indirect means used by leaders to impact learning. Leadership focus or indirect means used

to improve teaching and learning remains prominent, with Leithwood et al. (2020) revising a prior claim by now stating that “school leadership improves teaching and learning, indirectly and most powerfully, by improving the status of significant key classroom and school conditions” (p. 12). The current study found that they navigated this terrain using a data-driven approach to decision-making, focusing on communication and planning, and curriculum leadership through monitoring and support. These elements of strengthening the instructional core are elaborated on below.

6.3.1 Using Data-Driven Decision-Making

The novice principals explained what guided their decision-making. They reported that they collected available data, analysed it, and used the findings of the analysis to inform their decisions. This approach to decision-making is typical of data-driven decision-making (4Ds). 4Ds involves systematically collecting data, analysing it, and using the findings to inform and guide decision-making on various aspects of school improvement (Marsh & Farrell, 2013; Slavin et al., 2013). The 4Ds is solicited to motivate, drive and validate the need for changes in enacting and responding to these activities (Slavin et al., 2013). It is applied by obtaining timely data to understand the “root causes” behind the numbers and, from there, designing interventions targeted to the areas most likely to inhibit success (Slavin et al., 2013). In this study, the crucial areas where decisions were taken using 4Ds related to duty load allocation and identifying top and low-performing students for interventions. These activities are essential mechanisms to improve teaching and learning. The principals’ voices below demonstrate how this happened.

In Ntozinhle’s case, she obtained information about the unscrupulous practises in the duty load allocation before her appointment while engaging with staff through her open-door policy. This intelligence informed her decision to investigate the allegations by analysing learners’ performance. She explains:

We analysed the results of the past three years and realised that some teachers were struggling with their subjects. We had a staff meeting and raised these concerns. Some teachers came to me and voiced that they were given subjects to punish them. It was known they would struggle. I was shocked.

As a result of the analysis, guided by the 4D approach, Ntozinhle and her team intervened by reshuffling the duty loads:

We have now done duty loads such that teachers are allocated subjects according to their strengths.

Like Ntozinhle, for Mholi and Maqhinga, data analysis informed duty load allocation. Maqhinga stated:

We use the analysis to inform what we do next. As the staff, we sat down and looked at our expertise. Some teachers were stuck with subjects they did not know, negatively impacting the learner's educational experience and outcomes. We then allocated teachers accordingly.

Explaining how duty load allocation was done, Mholi shared similar sentiments:

We analyse the results every term. We change subjects and grades if they are not producing good results.

Allocating subjects to teachers according to their specialisations is imperative. Coetzee (2015) asserts that teachers must be qualified and teach within their phase and subject specialisations for quality education to be achieved. Teaching is compromised when teachers teach outside of their specialisation as good classroom practice is facilitated by highly qualified teachers (du Plessis 2015; Kola & Sunday, 2015). Initiating duty load reshuffles thus forms an essential component of human capital management, one of the responsibilities of principals.

Even though the reshuffling was an intervention to improve learning outcomes, Ntozinhle noted that some were still not content with the allocation. She stated, *"Not everyone is content, but we will keep using the data to help us do better."*

Though he relied on the 4Ds approach, Ubuntu focused and directed support interventions and strategies to assist teachers and learners. He explained:

Every term, we analyse the results to identify challenges and respond with intervention strategies. This also helps us identify learners that have the potential to get As and those that may not make it if they are not given special attention. It also helps us see if a teacher is struggling in a subject. When we identify this, we can provide support in this regard.

School size influences human resource allocation in schools. Ubuntu leads a relatively small school, which may constrain efforts to reshuffle the workload allocation. According to Leithwood and Jantzi (2009), larger schools can allow for increased specialisation through a more focused division of labour, as attested in Ntozinhle and Mholi's case. However, there

may be other explanations given that Maqhinga can action the reshuffling even though the size of the schools are similar.

Overall, the principals perceived using the 4Ds as necessary. They did not explicitly state the rationale for this approach. However, reshuffling loads and providing support to teachers and learners suggest that the principals understand the 4Ds as an approach that can indirectly improve student success and foster school improvement (Coburn & Turner, 2012; Marsh & Farrell, 2013). Influence is indirect because although data may diagnose and pinpoint strengths and weaknesses, it alone cannot improve student learning (Datnow & Kennedy, 2013).

Returning to the novice principals concerning this finding, the principals' ability to use 4Ds in such a manner is surprising. This is because various scholars (Conrad & Eller, 2003; Marsh & Farrell, 2013) assert that using the 4Ds approach is an intricate task that usually requires extensive expertise and skills, generally attained through professional development, an aspect that is still lacking for the principals. Additionally, even when the 4Ds approach is used, principals may provide general guidance, which does not interrogate past and present practices but focuses on future practices (Cosner, 2011). In such instances, no matter the depth of the analysis, 4Ds may not lead to significant school improvement (Marsh & Farrell, 2013). Nonetheless, the approach (4Ds) was used to strengthen the instructional core. The 4Ds approach required that principals improve communication and planning to ensure reliable data was available to make decisions. As it emerges from the data, the 4Ds approach required that principals focus on communication and planning, which is discussed below.

6.3.2 Strengthening Communication Systems and Planning

The principals focused on strengthening communication systems and planning to improve the instructional core. Multiple factors guided this focus, one of which was the need to protect instructional time. Instructional time is sometimes described as an "opportunity to learn," and loss thereof is time lost for learning opportunities (Abadzi, 2009). Bayeni (2015) states that considerable time is lost on task in schools located in deprived contexts. Similarly, Abadzi (2009) avers that time loss happens at the classroom and school levels (Abadzi, 2009). In this study, among other things, Abazi (2009) found that principals linked loss of instructional time with poor communication systems, lack of planning, and other external and classroom-based disruptions. This is discussed in Chapter seven, but as part of the leadership, principals in this study indicated that they improved communication systems and planning to protect instructional time.

Mholi shared his strategy to mitigate factors contributing to time wastage. He stated:

I devised a plan to mitigate time wastage by setting clear directives. We have a monthly briefing meeting, and towards the end of each month, we circulate the monthly planner with events for the upcoming month. I delegated this responsibility to one of the teachers. I plan my day and week accordingly. I also have a task team that mentors and inducts newly appointed teachers. I communicate any deadlines to the SMT and staff in advance.

Linked with ensuring planning and communication systems, Ntozinhle indicated that her school had weekly briefings where crucial information was disseminated:

We have weekly briefings, and if there is an urgent matter, we disseminate the information such that there is minimal disruption. We are doing this to protect instructional time. We make small, incremental changes. We have short-term, medium-term, and long-term goals for the school. That is what we are using to turn around the school. We created these plans together, and all had the opportunity to provide inputs.

In line with strengthening planning, Maqhinga indicated that they ensured that they planned the subsequent year's activities in advance:

Every year, we plan for the following year. We factor in the extra-curricular activities so they do not take away from instructional time.

According to Safir (2017), communication is essential to drive school improvement and change initiatives. The participants' voices attest to this as the rationale for improved communication systems is to protect instructional time to strengthen the instructional core through effective use of time. Successful leaders consider planning an effective tool to set direction and influence the instructional core (Leithwood et al., 2020). These scholars further assert that mediating distractions through communication and planning buffers staff from distractions, positively impacting the instructional core. Bayeni (2015) supports this view arguing that loss of instructional time is likely to result in the risk of knowledge acquisition while keeping on task and using the set time effectively is expected to increase the chances of learners acquiring the required content of the subject.

In another study, Naicker (2018), a seasoned principal leading a school in a deprived context, made similar observations. He observed poor planning and communication and the implications this had on instructional time (Naicker, 2018). Like the principals in this study,

Naicker (2018) strategized by focusing on thorough planning. This included but was not limited to completing enrolment intake and ensuring that teachers had prepared lesson plans, timetables, and class lists for the new academic year in advance (Naicker, 2018). For Naicker (2018), planning emerged as a key feature in driving school improvement and strengthening the instructional core.

In addition to improving communication to protect instructional time, Ntozinhle and Maqhinga set manageable goals and used communication to mediate these goals. This approach was intended to manage unrealistic expectations and create plans with measurable outcomes to monitor progress. Maqhinga mentioned the importance of prioritising activities. He said:

I have had to be honest and realistic about my expectations and what we can achieve. Everyone is placing demands. One person is asking about the overgrown grass. The other is asking why the school is not painted. Another is asking why we are not getting sponsors or partnerships. All these demands are placed on you. I have learned and accepted that I cannot achieve all I want simultaneously. All these are important, but some issues are pressing, like quality teaching and learning, and others will take time.

In Ntozinhle's case, she mentioned that the situation she inherited in her school could have easily made her fall into the trap of over-promising, only to find herself under-delivering. Seeing this danger made her realise that she had to be forthright and assess what was feasible.

Having inherited such a situation is not an excuse to justify failure. However, I realised there was an added expectation that things would happen miraculously as if we did not have to do the work. I did not want to promise the world and not deliver, so I managed expectations by setting realistic goals. I told them that we would not be able to solve all the problems that year. I know that change will not happen overnight, so I am patient.

Like Ntozinhle and Maqhinga, Ubuntu also communicated the need for change. As expressed below, this was met with pessimistic attitudes.

When I was appointed, I also communicated that initiating change was about evolving and moving to another level. Some were saying, "we were doing just fine." I wanted them to realise that fine was not good enough.

According to Lumby (2015), leadership change comes with assumptions and unrealistic expectations of what can be achieved. Such expectations may explain the principals' proactiveness in being direct with their communication about what can be achieved in the short, medium, and long term, easing the pressure of some unrealistic expectations that may be placed

on them. Additionally, being transparent is crucial because, being novice, the principals are still navigating the induction phase, which is about survival and gaining acceptance to legitimise their leadership (Optlatka, 2012). Leading with transparency may also reduce resistance to change initiatives. Spillane and Lee (2014) state that initiating change needs tact for novice principals; this often encounters resistance, as changes are often perceived as challenging the known way of life. Lavoie (2015) further asserts that transparency in leadership positively influences increased productivity by aligning employees' focus with leadership goals.

This section has discussed how the principals focused on communication and planning to protect instructional time and set realistic goals to strengthen the instructional core. The following section elaborates on curriculum leadership through monitoring and support as another strategy for enhancing the instructional core.

6.3.3 Curriculum Leadership through Monitoring and Support

This study's data revealed that the principals strengthened the instructional core through curriculum leadership, mainly by monitoring and providing teacher support. Like other principals leading in deprived contexts, the participating principals in this study used a wide range of interventions for curriculum leadership (see Bhengu & Mkhize, 2018; Chikoko et al., 2018; Leithwood & Sun, 2012; Naicker, 2018). The interventions focused on monitoring and support and included moderation of assessments and academic work, mentoring, and professional learning communities. However, unlike the principals in the cited studies, the principals in this study are novices.

In this study, the principals worked closely with Departmental Heads (DHs) to execute these activities. They expressed different views. For example, Ntozinhle emphasized monitoring academic work. She states, "*we emphasize the monitoring of academic work.*" Ubuntu shared how DHs take a prominent role in support and mentoring. He said, "*the DHs play an essential role in supporting teachers and monitoring.*"

Emphasizing the same point of monitoring, Mholi shared similar sentiments:

We make plans if we see that learners are performing poorly. We monitor and moderate learners' work, homework, and tests. I stress upon the Departmental Heads to work closely with teachers. We have to support and mentor them if they have challenges.

According to DeMatthews (2014), curriculum leadership is challenging for experienced and novice principals. Yet as illustrated, the principals were resourceful in navigating this terrain by soliciting the DHs' expertise and working closely with them to provide such curriculum leadership. The principals' behaviours are consistent with leadership for learning which describes the approaches used by school leaders to achieve school goals (Hallinger, 2011). Hallinger (2011) perceives instructional leadership as focused primarily on the principal's role, but sees leadership for learning as involving a broader range of leadership resources and personnel, such as Departmental Heads. In today's schools, DH's leadership is highly significant in developing departmental subcultures, thus placing them in an ideal position to provide leadership on curriculum matters (Ghamrawi, 2010, Spillane, 2006).

Using the leadership for learning lens also accommodates a more comprehensive set of activities (Hallinger, 2011). In line with this multiple-intervention approach, the principals in this study further extended support by providing professional development opportunities to teachers. These were facilitated by creating supportive network units where teachers could engage with each other and support each other, similar to configurations of professional learning communities (PLCs). PLCs are learning spaces where teachers work collaboratively and engage in ongoing dialogue to interrogate practice and develop more effective ways to enhance their instructional practices (Darling-Hammond & Richardson, 2009). Two principals, Ubuntu and Maqhinga, who were also critical friends, created these PLCs internally and externally between their schools. As stated by both of them, this was a new initiative. However, they had already seen positive progress in this regard. Their voices are presented below:

We have paired with Buntu's school. The teachers have professional development workshops and set joint assessments. We are going back to basics. (Maqhinga)

Most recently, they have been experimenting with co-teaching. Teachers who teach the same subject work closely together. Sometimes, they swap the teaching of specific sections according to their strengths, and the other will observe. This seems to be working because the teachers are engaging in peer learning. They also moderate each other's assessments and class activities. We do this internally and externally with Maqhinga's school. (Ubuntu)

Through the principals' voices, we learn that the PLCs were characterised by collective peer learning and dialogue, essential characteristics of PLCs (Feldman, 2017). The value of the PLCs lies in focusing on the "process and product of the learning process " (Feldman, 2017, p.

70). Over and above, the principals demonstrate effective leadership by creating avenues for building capacity internally and in the broader school community (Leithwood et al., 2010).

In this theme, we learn that the principals relied on multiple interventions for curriculum leadership. These were monitoring, supporting, and forming internal and external PLCs. The findings show that the principals worked closely with DHs to support and monitor the curriculum. Additionally, through their relationship as critical friends, two principals (Maqhinga and Ubuntu) initiated PLCs to provide additional professional development avenues. Overall the theme has shown the diverse leadership practices that the principals enacted to strengthen the instructional core. With this intention in mind, the section below discusses how the principals strived to model and reinforce positive behaviours by leading by example.

6.4 Leading by Example!

The data suggests that novice principals also focus on leading by example. In this theme, I elaborate on what the principals perceived as positive behaviours and how they modelled them, hoping that others would emulate the same behaviour. The principals mentioned a similar pattern of professionalism and value-laden behaviours, as the standard they used to lead by example.

Ubuntu stated the following as fundamental principles anchoring his leadership repertoire.

I lead by example, set a positive tone, communicate, and give people space to participate. I make sure that I am punctual. Even when I am not feeling well, I come to work and do what I must. I am active in all activities, so that is how I get the buy-in of others. I treat teachers and learners alike, guided by my values. I have instilled a culture where we treat and talk to each other respectfully. I am a servant leader.

Additionally, Ubuntu mentioned the consequences such behaviours had reaped for transforming the ill-discipline of some of the learners.

This has positively transformed some of our ill-disciplined learners, who have started to unlearn some negative behaviours.

Having come into her identity of being a leader, Ntozinhle stated the following regarding her behaviours of leading by example:

I am self-disciplined. I come to work early. I treat everyone with respect. I am open-minded, and I listen to others. I am consistent in how I treat people. I do not have favourites. I love the children I teach.

She further shared how praying about her work assisted her and how she was being stretched to outgrow some of her toxic behaviours, which, if left unchecked, would cast doubt on her leadership and her vocation.

I pray every day about my work. I pray before coming to work because I do not know what each day brings and what I will face. I pray to be non-reactive, calm, and consistent in how I engage and treat people. As such, this journey has made me even closer to God. I am growing spiritually. I seek his guidance to be all that I need to be. God is humbling me. I am being shaped positively and see myself growing from my old, toxic habits.

Mholi focuses on striving for excellence and being respectful and fair. He mentioned the following:

My guiding philosophy is *ukuzimisela* (always striving to do his best) and striving for excellence. I am also self-motivated, respectful, and guided by integrity. I treat the teachers equally. That is what I model and encourage to teachers and learners.

Drawing on his identity as a teacher, Maqhinga focused on leading by example in his insistence on excellence in teaching and learning and neutralizing hierarchies that come with leadership. He uttered these sentiments:

I do my best. I go the extra mile. That also rubs off on them (teachers and learners). They match what I do and even exceed the effort I put in. That is my approach. We have a collegial relationship with the staff. I see myself as a teacher with an office. I don't know if I feel like this because we are a small school and I also teach or because we are here for a common purpose: to teach our learners. Who occupies what position is a non-issue. I do that to the point that I now do it on purpose. I don't want a person to be intimidated by my title or to respect me because of my position. I want them to do that because of my deeds and acts of service. That's how I do things. You will never hear me utter the words I am a principal.

He (Maqhinga) further mentioned how he leads by example and how such modelling impacts teachers and learners alike.

There is a teacher who teaches Physics, and he was very pessimistic. He was one of those who teach a subject but claims learners are expected to fail it. I always tell my Accounting

learners that we are aiming for a 100% pass rate, and he has always perceived this goal as overly ambitious, but he has changed over time. In one meeting, he said, “Maqhinga says he wants 100% for Accounting, and he is not even at school sometimes, then we can’t have an excuse of our learners not passing.”

The same principal (Maqhinga) mentioned how he led by example to change socialising behaviours perpetuated through the hidden curriculum. Maqhinga believed that to reinforce good practice and disturb negative stereotypes, he had to normalize and model good practice, especially for his learners. He explains this below:

Through my actions, I think I am also dismantling some negative norms. The learners were writing a paper, and I realised litter in the front, so I took a broom and started sweeping. As I was cleaning, a senior teacher (in age) came out of nowhere and asked to speak to the learners. She was so angry. She went into the class and said, “can I please see the girls after this period?” After the period, I went to her, and I told her that learners would emulate my behaviour, and they have over time. We cannot preach cleanliness but not want to get our hands dirty. I also told her that it was not just the girls responsibility to keep the classroom clean, and she should address all the learners about cleanliness. She still doesn’t get it, though (*chuckles*).

Once again (see Working with and for others, 2.5.2), the principals’ actions indicate that they used servant leadership as a frame to guide their actions in leading by example. In this instance, servant leadership is demonstrated through leading by example, modelling, persuasion, stewardship, and humility, expressed through the desire to serve others (Russel & Stone, 2002; Spears, 2010; Van Dierendonck, 2011). Moreover, modelling is consistent with *Ubuntu* guided leadership (Malunga, 2009; Ncube, 2010). Malunga (2009) states that role modelling assists leaders in legitimizing their leadership. This is enhanced when leaders lean on African values such as honesty, respect, integrity, dignity, compassion, and fairness to guide their leadership (Malunga, 2009; Nzimakwe, 2014).

Additionally, Leithwood et al. (2020) aver that leading by example, or what they describe as modelling the schools’ values and practices, is a fundamental leadership approach used by successful principals to demonstrate responsiveness to the contexts in which they work. Similarly, Juntrasook (2014) states that modelling is an effective leadership practice that makes leaders extraordinary. Leading by example also demonstrates referent power use instead of position power. This is a diplomatic means to influence followers, especially for novice

principals still attempting to gain approval, establish their legitimacy as new principals, and demonstrate leadership ability (Lord & Hall, 2005; Yaffe & Kark, 2011; Spillane et al., 2015).

This section has discussed how the principals focused on leading by example to influence others to model similar behaviours. The intention was to reinforce positive behaviours, disrupt negative stereotypes, and influence others to set high standards for teaching and learning. Overall, leading by example was a tool used to shape school goals positively. The following section elaborates on how principals enacted multiple roles and identities to navigate the unknown terrain of being a novice and leading in a deprived context.

6.5 We Wear Many Hats

The data shows that novice principals displayed and used multiple, interchanging identities to lead their schools, termed “we wear many hats.” The principals wearing many hats demonstrated flexibility and fluidity in identity change. Wearing many hats was extended using personal or individual level, relational, and collective identities (Brewer & Gardner, 1996; Lord & Hall, 1995; Miscenko et al., 2017).

Explaining this aspect, Ntozinhle highlighted how she had to work beyond what was expected and play multiple roles, some of which she was not trained for. She explained:

We have to go beyond the call of duty, and we have to be all-rounders. We are police officers, nurses, teachers, social workers, cooks, and kitchen girls. We wash their clothes; we bathe them. I cannot explain it.

Similarly, Maqhinga explained that he became a parent, a friend, and a confidant to his learners. He stated:

I am many things to our learners. I am a father, a brother, a teacher, a confidant, and a friend. Maybe they can relate to me because I am honest about who I am, where I come from, and what I wish and want from them. I use my story to inspire them.

Without giving names on what role he played, Ubuntu’s utterance, as shown below, suggests that his work was beyond being a principal. He stated:

We have to intervene on multiple issues to ensure our learners’ well-being. Once I understand the learners’ situation, I can extend and direct the support they need. We cannot ignore these stories when they come to us. We have to act and get them the help they need.

Mholi's multiple identities are similar to those of Ntozinhle and Maqhinga. Like these two principals, Mholi played a father and friend figure beyond being a teacher to the learners. His voice below provides substance to this:

Like the teachers who taught me, I view and enact my role as a teacher, father, friend, motivator, and so on. I connect with the learners, communicate with them, and be accessible to them. This is also the kind of leader I have become. If a learner does not have a uniform, we make a plan. If we can see that the learner is neglected, we rope in external stakeholders like social workers to intervene. We do all we can.

Being a 21st-century principal is a specialist occupation that requires a broad range of skills and expertise (Bush et al., 2011). The principals' ability to wear many hats and enact multiple identities demonstrates the understanding of the complexity of this role, a dimension of leadership well cited in the literature (Leithwood et al., 2020; Lai & Cheung, 2015; Scribner & Crow, 2012). That being said, this is not an easy undertaking, especially for novice principals.

In various studies (Spillane & Lee, 2014; Tuma & Spillane, 2019; Wieczorek & Manard, 2018), novice principals found themselves overstretched. This was because of the diverse number of tasks and the expectation that they have to be everything to everyone by wearing multiple hats (Spillane & Lee, 2014; Wieczorek & Manard, 2018; Tuma & Spillane, 2019). In Chapter five, through the principals' stories, we learn that their early life experiences have influenced their socialisation to their new roles (Ribbins, 2008). A common thread in the stories is the life of strife and the significant contribution of schooling and education in shaping the principals' lives, as they have been schooled in a similar environment. This socialisation explains the principals' abilities to use multiple, interchanging identities shaped by their life experiences. As found in the literature (Johnson et al., 2012), leader identity is a yardstick for leader behaviours and effectiveness.

This theme has focused on the principals' use of multiple identities to navigate the terrain of leading in a deprived school context. The principals expressed that they wear many hats extending beyond their roles as school principals. The principals used their individual, collective, and relational identities to provide care and restore the well-being of learners. Beyond the use of multiple identities, the principals also shared other ways in which they had to be flexible in their leadership approach.

6.6 We are Active Policy Enactors

In the previous theme, the principals demonstrated flexibility by using multiple identities. This theme focuses on how principals apply flexibility in implementing policies by acting as active policy enactors. Policy enactment explains how policy is interpreted, translated, reconstructed, and remade as it interacts with the different political actors, the sites, and tiers of the contexts for which it is intended (Ball et al., 2012; Maguire et al., 2015). In this study, the political actors are the novice principals who are intermediaries between the government and school stakeholders (Bayeni & Bhengu, 2018). Through social, cultural, and emotional construction and interpretation, principals interact with policy, mediate and negotiate in an interactive process considering the context which influences their response to the policy texts (Bayeni & Bhengu, 2018; Colman, 2021; Maguire et al., 2015). In this study, it emerged that the principals were active and not passive policy enactors who engaged in the process described above. They implemented policies in contextualised ways considering the school context and how things are and work in their schools. They presented the following views evidencing active policy adaptation:

Mholi explained fluidity in his policy approach, where he accommodated the Department and staff in implementing policy. He stated:

Flexibility means that I must also be sensitive to the environment I find myself in. As such, I lead beyond the policy. So, if I have to bend policy to accommodate the Department, I also have to bend it to accommodate the staff as they are working beyond what is expected of them.

Mholi further mentioned discerning and not addressing every misdemeanour, illustrating how he practiced this fluid approach.

I have to be discerning and choose my battles. Not every misdemeanour must be dealt with. If it has to be, I must use my mind to tackle the issue. I am not reactive. I do this so that when it is addressed, it can be constructive and prevent the same problem from happening. Being rigid does not work in some cases.

Ubuntu shared how he contextualized policy by filtering the policy texts through his interpretation and sensitivity to the school context.

We all make these sacrifices, so if it means turning a blind eye here and there, I do that. For example, if a teacher requests to leave early or comes late, I will not ask them to take half-day leave. I know that the teacher has sacrificed their weekend and their afternoons.

Leading with an iron fist does not help schools in such contexts because teachers are doing beyond what they are paid to do.

Additionally, he mentioned how cost-cutting measures resulted in diverting from policy prescriptions, further evidencing how teachers were already doing more than expected, to the extent of using personal financial resources when attending professional development activities. Stating this, he said:

The things that the policy says we must pay for are a luxury. For example, giving teachers money to attend workshops is a luxury. They use their own funds. When I travel to the circuit and district offices or run work-related errands, I use my own money for petrol. I do not claim. If we claim from this limited pool, then by June, we will have no money left, and then we will have to borrow or find alternative means to make ends meet for the rest of the year.

Maqhinga shared unconventionally asserting himself instead of using policies.

There are instances where I know I should be assertive, but I am not assertive in a conventional manner. It is just not in my nature. I expect people to know when they are doing something wrong; we are adults and professionals.

Evidencing this unconventional approach, Maqhinga further mentioned the following incident:

Recently teachers left early because it was during exams. We had agreed that the time would be used for marking so they could be relieved during the holidays. I'm not the guy who will go and scream, and I'm not confrontational. They knew I had seen them when they returned to school the next day. I greeted them and said, "*Sanibona, ninjani, ayisazani. Ilokhu singcinene izolo, kombe bekuyisikhathisini?*" (Hi, how are you? I last saw you yesterday. What time was it, by the way?) By saying that, I believed I had conveyed the message that their behaviour was unacceptable. That was the last day an incident like that happened. I assert myself in that unconventional way, not through quoting policies.

Ubuntu used a similar approach by focusing on the bigger picture. Teaching and learning was this bigger picture and took precedence over other issues. He had the following to say:

I have to look at the bigger picture in all that I do. I am not harsh or strict, so I do not believe in that approach, but I am assertive when I have to be. The policies that the DBE prescribes are just there on paper. Therefore, if it means I have to be flexible and bend the rules, I do that. I look at the bigger picture.

These findings demonstrate an awareness of policy enactment as a phenomenon in the policy implementation process. Colebatch (2006) states that policy enactments are multi-layered, complex, and messy. Still, they help us understand the complicated relationship between pronouncements and texts and the actual practice or application of policy in dynamic, situated contexts like schools. Additionally, these findings support notions of policy as a process that is not straightforward but as a practice that occurs in spaces led by political actors, thus bringing rise to unpredictability, nonlinearity, and adaptability (Bayeni & Bhengu, 2018; Braithwaite et al., 2018) in an everchanging “state of becoming” (Webb & Gulson, 2012). To this end, Bayeni and Bhengu (2018) state that “at each level, policy is highly mediated by the politicking and contextual dynamics ...it is contested, challenged, and reinterpreted based on the context and embedded experiences (p. 4).

These findings further evidence that, at times, policies are a source of contradiction as the messages articulated are not consistent with the environments for which they are intended (Bayeni, 2018). In his work, this scholar found that principals leading schools located in a deprived context must mediate between the contextual circumstances and the policies they are expected to implement by finding “creative, innovative and diplomatic” ways to handle policies to achieve school goals (Bayeni, 2018, p. 228). The findings demonstrate how the principals engage in a “tactful gameplay” by negotiating competing interests and, at times, conflicting demands and expectations leveraged by the Department, the context, and the expectations of those they lead (Bayeni, 2018; Trujillo et al., 2021). They further suggest that policies create power structures that may enable or constrain the work leaders (Trujillo et al., 2021). This theme has demonstrated how principals act as active policy adapters and how through policy adaption, they contextualised policies. The next theme will discuss how principals enact leadership in response to contextual demands.

6.7 Leading with the Context in Mind

The current study found that the principals lead with the context in mind. The principals shared sensitivity and awareness of the deprived context. This gave them a kind of mindfulness used as a frame of reference for informing and shaping their leadership practices. Using similar “tactful gameplay” as in the previous theme, the principals sought “creative, innovative, and diplomatic” means to enact leadership (Bayeni, 2018, p. 228). The principal’s voices are shared below:

Ntozinhle expressed how the socioeconomic challenges experienced by the learners and prevalent in the community shaped what she could and could not do.

I cannot be the principal who constantly calls in parents for trivial issues. We cannot say we want a cake sale, and the kids must bring baked goodies. We cannot be harsh on learners who come to school with incomplete homework. Instead, we must navigate these issues.

Similarly, Maqhinga was conscious of the social ills plaguing the learners' communities and their impact on the learners and their circumstances. Evidencing this consciousness, he stated:

I honestly think that sometimes we magnify things that are non-issues. We have unruly and ill-disciplined kids, but I don't overstate this issue. It is understandable; they are kids, so you can't be angry at a child for being a child. We have a high prevalence of teenage pregnancy. When I see a pregnant learner, I tell the teachers, "that is me in that stomach."

Maqhinga also stated how he found some attitudes paradoxical. Commenting on this, he said:

Sometimes when we get to certain levels of life, we tend to shift from reality and act as if the things happening now are new when they have been happening all along. We might have been part of them or their results at some point. The school is part of the broader society. We must accept this and try our best to change it by positively influencing the learners to make better choices.

While contending with these paradoxes, Maqhinga focused on ways to help the learners change their circumstances and pave a brighter future for themselves. Unlike before (see *Changing my mindset*, pp.129-130), he was now in a school with different dynamics, which required a new approach:

Before we can even worry about A's, we must first concern ourselves with them passing and making them believe they can pass. Some learners have been told they will never amount to anything. They are like "rejects," so to speak. So, we first need to help them unlearn that and make them believe they are just as capable as any other learner.

The challenge of demotivated learners also resonated in Ubuntu's story. This was a complicated endeavour given that the school already had a negative nickname called the "scrapyard school." This nickname implied that those who went there were "scraps" and "rejects" that needed to be panel beaten to shape. Ubuntu said:

The reality is most of our learners are demotivated. Some do not see the value of education because they look at others who have matriculated and are sitting at home unemployed.

Also, this school attracts learners who have been suspended and ex-dropouts. They come here for a second chance. The CES even said that if a principal can see that a learner is likely to drop out, they must advise them to come to this school.

In responding to this reality, Ubuntu mentioned and explained the groundwork they engaged in to change this negative attitude and make learners believe in themselves. He said the following:

Before anything, we must make them believe this (education) is a worthy pursuit. This is not easy because it means I must be intentional in what I do and say. This is not a solo effort or a cosmetic ploy to trick them. It has to be authentic and come from a good place. It requires consistency and alignment in what we say and how we act. I cannot say they are capable; the next day, and then when they disappoint me, I give up on them. I have to keep at it.

Additionally, these two principals shared how they had to go the extra mile even after they had tried to renew a sense of self-belief in the learners. They stated:

When I talk about going beyond the call of duty and going the extra mile, I am talking about the “panel beating we do.” We have to dig deep with minimal resources. We know we are working against the tide, so we must put in the extra effort. (Ubuntu)

I have never asked teachers to work on weekends, but there is a teacher teaching here almost every Saturday. During these holidays, voluntarily, teachers taught for two weeks. I was there because I also have subjects. I came when I felt like I had done enough and I had done everything I needed to do with the learners. I was here. (Maqhingwa)

These findings confirm the associations between context and leadership (Leithwood et al., 2020; Miller, 2018; Ryu et al., 2022). In their review revisiting the seven strong claims about successful school leadership, Leithwood et al. (2020) reassert that “the ways in which leaders apply these basic leadership practices – not the practices themselves – demonstrate responsiveness to, rather than dictation by, the contexts in which they work” (p. 9). These findings suggest that context influences how problems are understood and addressed (Ryu et al., 2022). The principals’ consciousness of context and the ability to shape their practices indicate that they realize that context shapes leaders’ actions, and reciprocally leaders shape the contexts in which they work. This theme encapsulates how the principals lead with the context in mind and how this context awareness shapes their leadership. The following theme focuses on the leadership of care.

6.7.1 A Leadership of Care

The findings reveal that the principals enacted a leadership of care or caring leadership. According to Noddings (1992; 2013), care is a set of relational practices that foster mutual recognition, growth, development, empowerment, human community, culture, and possibility. It is expressed through actions shaped by positive virtues such as compassion, empathy, and respect (Van Dierendonck & Patterson, 2015). Additionally, care leadership does not rest on a contractual obligation, power of authority, or expectation of return (Smylie et al., 2016). It is not an additional responsibility in workload or job description, but all actions can be enacted through a caring lens and approach when one's motivation is grounded toward the betterment of others (Lawrence & Maitlis, 2012). Caring is conscious action. It is not only what one does but also how and why one does it (Noddings, 2005). Consequently, "caring is at play all the time... Every action and interaction can take on qualities of caring or not caring, and these qualities have consequences for parties to the interaction, including the observers" (Louis et al., 2016, p. 312).

Various factors drove this leadership approach. Amongst others was the context of multiple deprivations, which has been shown as a factor that shapes principals' leadership in the previous theme. All principals shared being loving and working against the grain to ensure the well-being of the learners while they were under their care. Their voices are presented below:

Ntozinhle shared how she emphasized love and provided care through her leadership. She explained how this element of leadership was essential in the deprived context as learners needed to be nurtured and affirmed. She stated the following:

Above everything else, our learners need love. They need to experience being children. We have to start just by reaffirming the children and uplifting their spirits. As you can see, this school has no paving. I come here clean every morning. The kids will run up to me, hug, and tug me. It is not because they are ill-disciplined they are looking for affection. I have accepted that I come in clean and leave dirty. It is part of the job. I always say this to teachers; let us love our learners like our children. When you go to class, be love, and all the rest will fall into place. Build a relationship with them. Once they know you love them, by the time you teach your content, they will be attentive because they know and feel that you care for them.

Mholi expressed a similar leadership repertoire of care and empathy. He stated:

I love children. The first time I was told I was loved was at school. So I also tell my learners the same thing. I observed that learners have different problems. In some of those children, I saw many facets of myself. We do all we can to secure their well-being. While there is not much we can do to change their circumstances at home, when they are here, in our care, we try our best to make them feel loved and worthy.

Among other things, Maqhinga shared being a father figure to the learners. Below he shares how learners could confide in him, illustrating the enactment of care.

I remember a girl who came to me and told me she had a boil in her thigh near her vaginal area. When the female teachers asked her what was wrong, she told them she had told me about it. They were livid because, to them, that kind of information should not be discussed with a man principal. That is the kind of society we live in. To me, she is a child. It doesn't matter.

Ubuntu described the school relationships as those of a family with teachers seeing each other through the lens of sisterhood and brotherhood emanating from their shared history. The family extended to teachers seeing the learners as their children, making the school one big family. He said:

The learners are our children. Without them, we will be jobless. But that is not what makes us love them. We love them because we have taken on the parent role as well. My mother did her best, never giving up on me even when I failed. That is the same kind of approach we take with our learners. We all need each other.

Various studies (Grant et al., 2010; Louis et al., 2016; Smylie et al., 2016; Van der Vyver et al., 2014) support the notion of caring leadership, arguing that the caring role is one of the fundamental functions of school leadership. There is an argument that a combination of strong instructional core and social support through care is essential because they support improved student outcomes while simultaneously ensuring their personal well-being (Grant et al., 2010; Louis et al., 2016; Smylie et al., 2016). Ancess (2000) refers to this as “a condition of nurture and rigor or affiliation and intellectual development” (p. 595). Grant et al. (2010) articulated this through two dimensions: pedagogical care and welfare care. Louis et al. (2016) and Grant et al. (2010) further state that focusing exclusively on the instructional core may be insufficient and harmful to students in high-poverty schools like this study. A narrow focus does not sufficiently cultivate the quality of social relations needed as a foundation for effective teaching and learning (Hoy et al., 2006). Studies (Lee & Smith, 1999; Marks, 2000) have found that

what is needed is a combination of strong instructional and academic focus and social support through care so students can benefit in their academic success and personal well-being.

Additionally, as shown above, this study shows that caring is not gendered. While this may be the case in the current study, in contrast, this type of leadership emerges as gendered in other studies (Lumby & Azaola, 2014). The implications are that, when caring is seen as gendered work, it can socially and politically marginalise those doing it by placing an undue burden and expectation on women alone (Finch, 1984; Gordon, 1996).

In this study, the leadership of care was present at both the interpersonal and organizational levels. The interpersonal level refers to personal relationships, while the organizational level pertains to a school-wide approach where the space itself and the behaviours are affirming and nurturing (Smylie et al., 2016). According to Smylie et al. (2016), scholarship on caring leadership has mainly focused on the interpersonal level and seldom addresses the organizational level. At the organizational level, the principals in this study demonstrated care by making the schools safe havens and providing a holistic education. They provided holistic education by providing extra-curricular and recreational activities. Their voices are presented below:

Education must be holistic...the hidden and the formal curriculum are equally important...We have made our school a safe place for them to be children. For some of them, like myself, many years ago, school is the only place they can be children. We organize fun educational trips for them...This year we are busy organizing more events beyond the excursions. I want them to be happy, and to have fun. I do not want to be in an unhappy school. (Mholi)

The educational experience extends to making this school a haven, a place of love, hope, and comfort. The main goal is for us to be able to provide our learners with a holistic educational experience. We offer our learners extra-curricular activities that teach them different skills and allow them to have fun and develop their talents. These are children; unfortunately, this environment has scarce opportunities for recreational activities. We want them to at least have them when they are at school. (Ntozinhle)

Because of the context, we have the vision to make the school a second home- a place of safety and refuge... We have an awards ceremony with broad categories to recognize all talents. We assist our Grade 12 learners with applications to tertiary institutions and bursaries. (Ubuntu)

This school is not easy on the eye, but it is home, where there is warmth, acceptance, and a sense of belonging. We assist learners with bursary applications and applications to the CAO, even to the extent of paying for some from our own pockets if we cannot source funding. We have sought sponsorship to allow our learners the opportunity to attend the career expo. (Maqhinga)

Grant et al. (2010) discovered similar findings in their research. Despite facing limited resources, teachers and school leaders in resilient schools were resolute in creating a positive learning environment for their students, fostering a collaborative partnership and cohesive teamwork. Their shared dedication to enhancing the educational climate was evident in their endeavors to make the classroom experience as enjoyable as possible, fostering a culture of learning and teaching. The teachers' eagerness to explore innovative approaches demonstrated their continuous pursuit of improvement. Notably, these schools harnessed the power of social networks, which played a crucial role in cultivating an ethics of care, effectively mitigating the impact of risk factors, and empowering the schools to rebound resiliently.

Smylie et al. (2016, p. 3) assert that “caring is at the heart of schooling.” The principals’ voices and subsequent actions suggest that they understand caring to not just be about concern but also involve activities to achieve specific goals on behalf of others (Smylie et al., 2016). They are able to effectively balance and provide both pedagogical care and welfare care as part of their work (Grant et al., 2010). Such leadership is akin to *Ubuntu* philosophy. According to Nzimakwe (2014), *Ubuntu* deals with compassion relating to providing care and love with the desire to make life more bearable and humane for others, especially those who experience various disadvantages. “Within *Ubuntu*, there is a concerted effort and commitment to advance their interests “(Nzimakwe, 2014, p. 32), as seen in the principals’ actions throughout this chapter.

6.8 Chapter Conclusion

This chapter described the leadership practices of novice principals leading schools in the context of deprivation. The findings indicate that principals draw on and use multiple practices to enact leadership and captain the bridge as they lead their schools. Seven themes were presented to describe these practices. The first theme that was discussed is building relationships through an integrated approach. The integrated approach relates to principals’ means to cultivate these relationships. In this study, these means were adopting an open-door policy and collaborating with others. What emerged from the findings is that the principals

earned stakeholders' trust and built relationships by being accessible and working collaboratively with the school community's multiple external and internal stakeholders.

The second theme that emerged related to improving teaching and learning by strengthening the instructional core through indirect means. To do this, the principals focused on three things. They used Data-Driven Decision-Making to guide them in decision-making on issues such as duty load allocation and monitoring of learner progress. The principals also strengthened communication systems and planned systemically. Driving this approach was the need to alleviate time waste which had direct implications for instructional time. Lastly, to improve teaching and learning, the principals, through the DHs, promoted a culture of curriculum leadership through monitoring and support.

The third theme, titled "Leading by example," described the behaviours principals model to influence the behaviours and attitudes of the internal school community members. The theme titled "We wear many hats" explained how the principals demonstrated versatility by using changing and fluid roles and identities to navigate leading their schools. Following this was the theme title "We are active policy enactors." What emerged from this theme is that principals act as active policy enactors, interpreting and contextualising policy directives to meet school demands and needs. The next theme, "Leading with the context in mind," described how the principals' contextual awareness and mindfulness influenced and shaped their practices. Lastly, the chapter discussed the final theme, "A leadership of care." This theme described how principals enact caring leadership at the interpersonal and organizational levels. Through these seven themes, a canvas of the leadership signature of novice principals emerged, and the question "*how do novice principals leading schools in the context of deprivation enact leadership?*" has been answered. The following chapter responds to research puzzle three and explains why novice principals lead in the ways they do.

CHAPTER SEVEN

WHY DO THEY COMMAND THE BRIDGE THIS WAY?

7.1 Introduction

The previous chapter presented the findings and discussions addressing how novice principals lead their schools. This chapter links to the previous chapter, responding to the third research puzzle, asking, “*why do novice principals leading schools in the context of deprivation enact leadership the way they do?*” or, alternatively, why do they command the bridge in the ways they do? The research findings suggest that the enactment of leadership is influenced by the self, crafted by life experiences, and manifesting as the identities of the principals. The second factor influencing leadership is context. The issue of context in this study is two-fold. It refers to multiple deprivations, the physical location of the schools, and the positionality of being a novice principal. Each of these contexts interplays in different ways, influencing the enactment of leadership. This chapter will thus explore the intersection between leadership and context, looking at being a novice, working in a deprived context, and seeking to understand why these leaders lead in the ways they do. While the chapter is presented in themes, it is essential to state that there may be overlaps because some factors are interwoven in the sphere of influence.

7.2 Anchored by Past Experiences

In this study, the principals shared that they lead in the ways they do because of their childhood, educational, and professional experiences. Thus, past experiences anchored the leadership practices of the participating novice principals as these were early socialising factors in forming their identities. Hallinger (2018) posits that identity is attached to life experiences. Various scholars (Bush, 2018; Crow & Miller, 2017; Hallinger, 2018) aver that life experiences serve as a resource base through which we filter through and interpret information, problems, opportunities, and situations. In this theme, I will present how childhood, educational, and professional experiences shaped the principals and how they used them to lead their schools.

7.2.1 Childhood Experiences as Socialising Experiences

In this study, childhood experiences emerged as a factor shaping and influencing the leadership practices of novice principals. According to Ribbins (2008), childhood experiences are highly influential as socialising experiences for novice principals. The experiences shared were vast, with some not directly linked to leadership. Trials and tribulations experienced in childhood concerning the shouldering of responsibilities were a common trend. They also shared how

their upbringing in a loving and nurturing environment was a powerful socialising agent. Their voices are presented below:

As the eldest child, caring for his siblings fell on Ubuntu when he, his siblings, and his mom left their homestead. Ubuntu reflects on this experience identifying it as an opportunity to cultivate management skills that he now draws from as he leads.

My childhood was also another resource. Being the eldest, I was responsible for taking care of my siblings. I had to grow up, and I had to do it quickly. In hindsight, I realise that was my first leadership experience. I learned to be responsible, plan, delegate, control, and monitor.

Barely in her teenage years, Ntozinhle had to pause her dreams and assist her parents in providing for their household. It is not surprising that Ntozinhle exercises patience as a leader.

When I completed Grade 7, I had to drop out of school. The distance from my house to the nearest high school was far away. My other three siblings were already in high school. My father could not afford to enrol me and pay for transport costs. My parents asked me to stop, and I obliged. I looked for piece jobs to help my father support the family.

Maqhinga narrated how a school trip changed his life (See The school trip that changed my life, 5.5.3). This incident has aided him in being decisive, something he now uses as he leads.

Making this decision and sticking to it has influenced my becoming. I look at situations and decide based on the case. Let me give an example; recently, we had heavy rains. Before I even called the Circuit Educational Specialist, I called all the teachers and told them to observe the situation, and if they felt that it was not safe to travel, they should not go to school.

Maqhinga also shared how being a product of teenage pregnancy shapes his perspective and outlook.

When I see a pregnant learner, I tell the teachers, “that is me in that stomach.” I make sure the learners are supported and are not ostracized. Sometimes when we get to certain levels of life, we tend to shift from reality and act as if the things happening now are new even when they have been happening all along. We were part of them at some point and are even results of them. The school is part of the broader society, and we must accept this and try our best to change society by positively influencing the learners to make better choices.

As a child, Mholi experienced abandonment (see A childhood of strife, 5.2.1). In his solitude, he developed the ability to think independently and plan for his future:

When I was alone, I was able to think. I was able to dream. I was able to plan for my future.
I learned to be self-reliant, decisive, and strong-willed.

He further explained that he was mature for his age, drawing older people towards him because of this maturity and demeanour.

I was often described as being too serious for my age. Older people were drawn to me and told me I was a straight talker who could give honest and sound advice.

It is not surprising that Mholi is an autonomous novice principal. As presented in Chapter six, this does not imply he does not work with others (see Collaborating with others, 6.2.2). However, unlike the other three principals, he does state that he relies on himself to learn the job and that more experienced principals seek his counsel, which is another element of collaboration.

What has carried me is that I take it upon myself to learn and understand how to do my job. I bother myself with wanting to know. That is just me... Even the older principals who are more experienced call me and ask me how to do certain things. That tells me that I am doing well. I have self-confidence, and I believe in myself.

The principals' voices suggest that hardships experienced in early childhood cultivated management skills, patience, decision-making, autonomy, and reflexivity, which are now part of the toolkit they draw from as they lead. According to Moorosi and Grant (2018), taking on duties at a young age is a socialising experience and preparation for leadership in the public domain. In this study, as in the present study, these childhood experiences also influenced the principals to develop a professional work ethic (Moorosi & Grant, 2018). Additionally, family and religious values were significant socialising childhood experiences mentioned.

Ubuntu used his mother's teachings to guide him and his leadership. He stated:

My mother has been and continues to significantly influence my life and how I lead. The values she instilled in me have carried me. She taught me *uyahlonishwa umsebenzi* (you must respect your job). These include treating people kindly, respectfully, with dignity, and being approachable. *Nokuba nobuntu kubalulekile* (having Ubuntu is also essential). *Nokuzithoba, nokukwazi ukuzehlisa, uxolise kubalulekile* (being humble and being able to apologise is very important).

Ntozinhle said, “*I am my mother’s daughter.*” She described her mother as an exemplary woman who, despite her socioeconomic status, was able to lead her family and community. She said:

I am my mother’s daughter. My mother was not just a housewife. She was a seamstress, taught Catechism at church, held leadership positions in the church, and had various community projects that she established to help other women. I often accompanied her to all these activities, learning how she carried herself and led with love, compassion, and meticulousness. I draw much of my character from her. She was not a victim of poverty. Instead, she was a change agent, a community builder, and someone people looked up to and respected.

Her parents were also a formidable team, imparting teamwork skills to her. Stating this, she said, “*My parents taught me teamwork. They were and still are a formidable team.*” Additionally, Ntozinhle shared how her loving upbringing and affirmation from her parents have shaped her leadership. This nurturing environment planted a seed of love in her, which shaped her leadership, as described in the previous chapter.

We were not consumed by the poverty that surrounded us. Even though we did not have much in terms of material things, we always had joy at home. We used to share. I come from a sharing family...Our parents spoke great things upon us, encouraged us, and assured us that our circumstances do not define us. Hence, a lot came out of my family *noma sasingeyilutho* (even though we were “nothing”).

Ntozinhle also mentioned how her humble beginnings informed her leadership repertoire.

Mina ngiyakwazi ukuhlupheka (I know poverty), so I can resonate with the lived experiences of our learners. I cannot punish them for being in this situation; mine is to lessen the pain. That is what motivates me here, in this community.

Ubuntu also mentioned harnessing the shared history of his colleagues into a collective consciousness, drawing from similar lived experiences, and using this as an energy source to motivate teachers to go the extra mile:

Our connectedness (staff) has made us realise we have a shared history. Most of us attended schools that faced similar challenges as this one. Most of us come from similar backgrounds as our learners, so we can resonate with their struggles. They are us. We know from our own experiences that if we can change the life of one learner, we can affect and

change the whole family. Because of this shared history, I do not have to do much work to convince teachers to go beyond the call of duty and go the extra mile.

Maqhingha made a similar comment:

In team buildings, through conversations, we have come to know that most of us are the product of schools similar to ours. Our backgrounds, though diverse, are similar to our learners. This is one of our driving forces. Beyond the call of duty, we do our best to expose learners to various opportunities and ensure their success.

Religious beliefs aligned with Christianity also emerged as highly influential in shaping principals' leadership. For some (Ntozinhle and Mholi), religion was a part of early socialisation, while for others, like Maqhingha, this came into being at a much later part of adult life.

Mholi explained how he relied on God's wisdom to guide him in his practice:

My education and life experiences have contributed to guiding how I lead. However, above all else, God's wisdom guides me. His wisdom has enabled me to use this education to get where I am. Education without wisdom is futile.

He also shared manifesting things into being, and the outcomes he believed had been the product of his manifestations.

I believe some things come to be if you speak and pronounce them. I believe I can speak things to life. You find conflict among teachers and other complicated issues in most schools, but I do not have such. Even the rifts that were here are being bridged. I always ask God for guidance and wisdom, and he always answers. That is why I trust the decisions I make.

Maqhingha consciously adopted the Christian faith (see *Healing my scars*, 5.5.12). Drawing on the teachings of Christ, he was able to find healing, learn forgiveness and find a set of values to ground him. He said, *"I am grounded in values of love, kindness, compassion, forgiveness, honesty, fairness, and respect."*

Unlike, Maqhingha and Mholi, Ntozinhle was raised in a staunch Christian family who always placed religion and family at the centre. From this upbringing, Ntozinhle leads with love and places care and the well-being of her learners at the forefront.

We were raised *ukuthi siwazise umdeni* (to acknowledge the importance of family). My family is a staunch Catholic, praying family grounded in strong Christian values. Respect

is a fundamental family value instilled in us from a young age. We were also taught to be accommodating. We were poor, but we always had relatives staying with us, and we never resented that. Oh, and love. Our parents loved us unconditionally, and we loved each as siblings in the same way.

Her vocation also guides her. Though it was a shield, she was aware it could be used against her if she acted in ways that were considered against the cloth. She explained this predicament as follows:

You must also remember that the vocation that shields me can be a double-edged sword. If I behave in a way that does not uphold it, it will not protect me. I am human; I experience anger, irritation, and other emotions. I have to rise above that. Even when someone is annoyed with me, and there is an altercation, I have to respond without necessarily lashing back at them and engaging them with the same emotions. This is not easy work because I work with different characters and personalities, and some people intentionally push your buttons to see how you will react.

The voices presented connect childhood experiences, values, and religious beliefs as early socialising agents in identity construction relating to principals' personalities, characters, and dispositions (McKillop & Moorosi, 2017; Moorosi & Grant, 2018). Like the participants in Moorosi and Grant (2018), the participating novice principals were not aware of the influence of these experiences or their impact. Still, they were early forms of socialisation that were sub-consciously influential in cultivating leadership characteristics, personalities, and value systems that later shaped their school leadership practices (Moorosi & Grant, 2018). Upon reflection, the NPs became mindful of the significance of these experiences as potent socialising agents towards their identities and how they enact leadership (Moorosi & Grant, 2018; Ribbins, 2008). Socialising experiences of the past further extended to educational experiences.

7.2.2 Educational Experiences as Socialising Experiences

The study also found that educational experiences were significant in socialising novice principals. These educational experiences occurred during early schooling and at teacher training institutions. The educational experiences were significant moulders of the principals' perceptions of the value of education. They included affirming experiences where the principals found a sense of belonging, igniting love and passion for the teaching profession. Not all the incidents were affirming. Although some were negative, they cultivated resilience

by teaching assertiveness and conflict-resolution skills. Some went further to propel them to disrupt instead of replicating some toxic behaviours they had been subjected to.

This study found that the principals shared a common belief in the value of education. This belief was influenced by their past experiences, with education being their key to success. Drawing from this, the principals embodied the practices of being change agents. They stated the following:

I think God brought me here to uplift these children and this community, to bring hope. I believe that I have been placed here to be used as a medium to transform lives. (Ntozinhle)

My goal is to see real transformation of the spaces I occupy and in the lives of those I meet...I believe I have been placed here to inspire hope and bring transformation. I might not be here forever, but if I can change the lives of those I touch, it will have a ripple effect. Education is what has elevated me from a dark place. Strangers have been my angels in life. That is what I also try to be. (Mholi)

I always say that we must understand that we are not just teachers. We are change agents. Giving our learners quality education, exposing them to opportunities, and motivating them to further their careers can significantly impact our society... While I serve my tenure, I want to make such an impact. One day I want this school to be what a school ought to be. That is the legacy I would love to leave behind. I will pass through time, but the school will remain a beacon of hope and a place for new beginnings for all those rejected elsewhere. (Ubuntu)

Teaching was never my passion, but when I started teaching, I realised I was positioned to help others and make a meaningful contribution to the learners I teach and the school I lead. This understanding gave me a sense of self-worth I never had when growing up... I am trying to restore hope and bring about change. (Maqhinga)

Maqhinga reflected on the toxicity and harm inflicted by uMalumekazi, his primary school teacher. In his case, though voiceless at the time of victimisation, his experience with uMalumekazi shaped him positively, inspiring him not to perpetuate such acts but to trouble them. This is significant because Van Der Vyver et al. (2014) note that in some cases, people who do not receive care tend to restrain from treating others that way. Maqhinga expressed the following in this regard:

Having seen the damages uMalumekazi had inflicted, as a teacher, I wanted to be the opposite of everything she had been. She was the perpetrator, but others were complicit in

her behaviour because they remained silent. I knew poverty, and I knew that education could be the tool that transformed the livelihoods of the learners.

According to Connell (2011), teachers are at the centre of reform. Though seeing themselves as change agents strategically placed to influence reform and enact leadership from this view, the principals were cognisant and conscious of troubling the inequalities that hindered transformative efforts inherent in the structural and systemic architecture of the system and context in which they lead.

Ntozinhle articulated this: *“I want to bring some sense of “normal” in a bizarre, abnormal situation. They might not get there, but I will try.”* The other principals shared similar sentiments:

I am honest and transparent with the staff and learners alike. One of the things I always say is that we must not normalize an abnormal situation. However, we must also not be consumed by the circumstances we find ourselves in. We must do our best to rise above them. We do it because we want to help our children and our communities. (Ubuntu)

We are not oblivious to the challenges. That means we must think in new ways and develop responses that are fit for purpose. That means the systemic challenges we are now teaching under have long existed. We cannot say we will start thriving for excellence once we have resources; that day may never come. We know this is not how it should be, but we cannot afford to be consumed by that... All I'm bringing to the table is my personality and myself, and I am helping people see that wherever you are, it is possible. (Maqhinga)

Beyond sowing seeds of hope in the educational project, educational experiences provided the principals with other lessons they use as they lead. Mholi recollected how he found his “place” at school.

At school, I found a sense of belonging for which I had always yearned. It was my place of refuge, where I could escape from the realities of the abandonment and exclusion I suffered at home.

He also shared how his teachers inspired him and made him aspire to one day become a teacher. He said:

My teachers were a significant influence in his life. They were like parents to me. In my area, the teachers were not just teachers; they were also activists and made sure they were positive role models for the youth. Their teachings and positive influence motivated me to

aspire to become a teacher and one day come and serve the community that had shaped and moulded me.

hooks (2000, p. 110) asserts that “to be truly visionary, we have to root our imagination in our concrete reality while simultaneously imagining possibilities beyond that reality.” In this study, we see the principals being the educational visionaries described by hooks, not lamenting the impossibilities but seeing themselves as having a part to play and playing that part in tirelessly using their leadership role to transform their schools. hooks (2003) further states, “educating is always a vocation rooted in hopefulness” (p. xiv). She further says that her hope comes from places and experiences of struggle where she has witnessed people positively transforming their lives and the world around them (hooks, 2003). In this study, the principals’ lives are the sites of struggle, and their lives, through others, have been transformed, influencing them to become visionaries looking beyond the immediate circumstances.

In his study, McGough (2003) found that aspects of the principals’ childhood experiences influenced their perspective on the value of school, the teacher, and the principal role. Like Mholi, these impressions would later shape the principals when they assumed leadership positions (McGough, 2003). Unlike Mholi, who had aspired to be a teacher because of his early impressions of teachers and schooling, Ubuntu and Maqhinga did not have such aspirations. They opted to do teaching because of limited opportunities and the inability to access their professions of choice. Ubuntu developed love and passion for teaching at college, a passion, and love that has sustained him throughout his career. It was not the place but the way the lecturers nurtured them and taught them earnestly. Ubuntu narrated as follows:

My number one driver is the passion and love I developed for teaching at college. When I arrived at the college, I did not have that passion for teaching. Once we started learning and engaging, my passion was ignited. It was not the content. It was the lecturers and the care they took to nurture us. I fell in love with teaching because I saw it as a vocation that would place me in a strategic position to change the lives of others. The training we received was proper preparation that still serves me as a principal.

Finding comfort for the first time in his life made Maqhinga continue with the teaching degree. During his studies, he also occupied leadership positions teaching him teamwork and negotiation skills.

I was one of those guys calling the shots in terms of making money and popularity... I was good at sports and played for the school team I later captained. I was also House Com at

some stage. That is what made me stay with the BEd. I got comfortable, and I got used to the space.

Mholi's experience at university resembles an informal apprenticeship. He was lucky to get an opportunity to learn leadership through practice and observation.

I was learning when I was with the people I mentioned, in their offices or presence. I was being schooled. I was learning how to handle myself professionally. I would watch Prof Sithole addressing a student and telling them how they should have done their research, and from these observations, I learned how to deal with people. I learned how to give constructive criticism. I still draw from these teachings and lessons. I know how to deal with people and behave professionally and ethically.

He also explained experiencing love and acceptance as he had been privileged to in his early years by his teachers.

They taught me to love. The way they treated me and supported me made me love and appreciate other people. They also made me love education. I looked at their work ethic and learned that one must serve with honour, love, and honesty. These are values I still hold close to me even today. This is who I am.

Beyond these affirming experiences, Mholi took on several leadership positions at the university. Although these tested him, these positions also shaped his leadership, assisting him in learning to navigate a highly charged, racially diverse environment and teaching him about conflict resolution.

In my second year, I was voted as the House Com. I was voted for even by the White students. I had many challenges in that position but managed to navigate them because I believe I am a natural leader. Some African students said I was sucking up to Whites when I was diplomatic. The Whites laughed at my poor English. I had to learn to stand by my word and my beliefs. My belief in myself carried me, and I managed to finish my term against these odds. I ... I am, however, glad I was thrown into the deep end. Those situations taught me to be brave, strong, and not shy away from challenges.

While pursuing her degree, Ntozinhle faced the discomfort of being scrutinised by her peers because of their curiosity about her vocation. She learned to turn her aggression into assertiveness and stand up for herself to protect herself from being the object of inquiry.

They were so curious about my lifestyle. I was like a case study. During breaks, boys would hover around me, asking me personal questions. They could not understand and

believe the commitment I had made. I became aggressive. It was challenging, but I later turned my aggression into assertiveness. It was then that they were able to back off.

Maqhinga reflected on how organically formed friendships had provided a support structure (see *The brotherhood that has always been there for me*, 5.5.13). At university, he found friends who became his brotherhood, met his wife, and started to appreciate the value of people:

All the friendships I have had developed organically. They have sustained me and empowered me in various ways. I have never told any of my friends about my circumstances, but they just did things that showed they somehow understood my situation. They are genuine people who never made me feel less. My friends are my brothers. Through their actions, I could see the goodness of people and the value of relationships. I learned to accept help, receive love, and be love. I realised that without people, you are nothing.

Though not supported by vast literature, Moorosi and Grant's (2018) study suggests that, although inadequate, initial teacher training serves as unexpected leadership preparation. Unlike that study's conclusions, novice principals' experiences in this study demonstrate that their experiences while training to become teachers were highly influential and significant in shaping their leadership practices. Albeit, while these principals could harness leadership lessons from these experiences, Moorosi and Grant (2018) suggest that leadership should be more integrated and intentional such that teachers are conscious of this preparation while engaged in their teacher preparation training. This strategic approach would be highly beneficial in the South African context, given that there is no formal leadership preparation programme. The following section thus discusses professional experiences and how they influence the principals' leadership practices.

7.2.3 Professional Experiences as Socialising Experiences

As already mentioned, locally, there is no pre-requisite teacher training programme for principalship. The usual trajectory is that principals start as classroom teachers (Bush, 2018; Moorosi & Grant, 2018). Bush (2016) states that this teaching experience is a significant source of socialisation in the principalship role and underpins the professional decisions principals make as they lead; similar findings that emerged in this study. The novice principals used these experiences and learnings to lead their schools once they were appointed. Three principals (Mholi, Maqhinga, and Ubuntu) were lucky to gain exposure to the administrative aspects of principalship while serving as PL1 and DHs.

Mholi explained how his attitude of going the extra mile (see Being a team player, 5.5.9) earned him the opportunity to receive exposure to various administrative aspects of school leadership.

I worked closely with the principals in both schools. They delegated various tasks to me that were above my level. Through those tasks, I learned about the day-to-day running of the school, school administration, different departmental policies, working with external stakeholders, and fundraising, to mention a few. This helped me understand various aspects I draw from as a principal.

Similarly, Ubuntu caught the attention of the principal, gaining his trust. He used this experience when he was appointed.

The principal kept me close, asking me to attend meetings in her absence, seeking my advice, and delegating other admin duties even though there was a more senior DH... I had always offered my help to the principal when he requested it. I realised I had acquired some experience in the day-to-day running of the school. I hit the ground running.

Maqhinga learned while on the job through more seasoned teachers who served as his mentors and support structure.

Throughout my teaching career, I have been fortunate to find older colleagues who took me under their wing and nurtured me, personally and professionally. Most were in senior positions or senior teachers with vast knowledge they shared with me. They were family orientated and taught me about family. They also mentored me in terms of work. I still have a relationship with some of them, and they continue to be a valuable support structure in my growth.

The three principals' experiences indicate that professional experiences are a powerful socialising agent for school leaders. These findings also suggest that as teachers, these principals were teachers leaders early in their careers. In his inquiry on the experiences of Irish novice principals, Murphey (2023) found that, like these principals, the novices in his study began as informal teacher leaders. Through this, they accessed professional learning before being principals (Murphey, 2023). As with childhood and educational experiences, professional socialisation occurs while school leaders are unaware it is happening and even before they may have ambitions for leadership (Moorosi & Grant, 2018). Still, they are early forms of socialisation that are sub-consciously influential in cultivating leadership characteristics, personalities, and value systems that later shape school leadership practices (Moorosi & Grant, 2018).

The findings of this study support existing evidence which suggests that socialisation toward principalship begins before the appointment (Hammond et al., 2017; Moorosi & Grant, 2018). This means that some leader identities, skills, values, attitudes, and knowledges required for principalship are developed and cultivated before the leadership role is assumed. Secondly, these findings confirm previous research (Clapp-Smith et al., 2019; Lord & Hall, 1995) asserting that novice principals heavily rely on identity work to mediate action in their early careers.

Crow et al. (2017) aver that identities “are not simply who we say we are, but reflect the motivation, drive, and energy connected to our actual practices” (p. 2). In Chapter six, it was discussed how principals enact leadership. Upon reflection, principals became mindful of the relationship between how they enact leadership and how the past has influenced and anchored this enactment. Past experiences are thus potent socialising agents towards identity development and leadership enacted as a result of the formed identities (Moorosi & Grant, 2018; Ribbins, 2008). This theme has discussed the significance of the past in informing leadership practices. The following theme focuses on the external contexts that shape principals’ leadership.

7.3 Steering the School Culture in New Directions

In Chapter six, I discussed building relationships through an integrated approach as one of the ways that novice principals enacted leadership. One of the reasons for this approach was the intention to steer the cultures of their school in new directions. School culture refers to how things are done in a school and how this way becomes ingrained and accepted as the standard of behaviour (Schein, 1985). Various scholars (Deal & Peterson, 2016; Hallinger, 2018; Hallinger & Heck, 2011) assert that culture can act as a constraint or an enabler of a leader’s efforts. In this study, the novice principals encountered different school cultures upon appointment, which needed steering in another direction.

7.3.1 Relationships for Peacebuilding

Two principals (Ntozinhle and Mholi) assumed their leadership duties in schools charged with conflict. Among other reasons, the conflict emanated from disputes over the succession for SMT posts. The principals shared that, to create a peaceful and healthy school context; they had to spend time understanding the issues fuelling the conflicts and finding ways to resolve and rebuild relations.

As evidence of this, below, Ntozinhle expresses the direness of the schools' situation:

When I arrived, *isimo sasimanzonzo* (the situation was tense), there was an internal conflict over posts and positions. The school was dysfunctional, and enrolment was dwindling. The community had lost faith in it. An unknown Sister's arrival was a strategy to dilute the tensions and minimize the internal disputes over positions.

Mholi voiced similar tensions surrounding the dispute over posts and how being an external appointment positioned him as a neutral person to mend the broken relationships:

I was appointed to a school that had factions. The teachers and the SGB were at loggerheads. I had heard that this was a result of disputes over posts. I knew that I had to find ways to bring the staff together and mend the broken relations. As an outsider, I saw myself as neutral and well-positioned to restore unity by rebuilding broken relationships.

These narratives give us a sense of a schooling environment charged with negative tensions. However, while the principals had some awareness of the schooling environments, for different reasons, upon arrival, they first immersed themselves in their environment to gain an in-depth scope and personal account of the contextual dynamics at play. Mholi stated: "*I took time first to understand the existing culture.*" In the same way, Ntozinhle first observed the cultural dynamics before attempting to change them. She states: "*When I arrived, all I did was merely observe to understand the prevailing culture, the politics, and the internal dynamics.*"

Emerging from these stories is that the decision first to observe was not an end in itself, but also a means to understand the prevailing school culture. The principals' action of understanding the culture first demonstrates mindfulness of positionality. Their positionality is that of being an outsider coming into their schools and understanding the complexities of steering culture as a novice principal. Grebenau (2018) states that change efforts fail because of the lack of mindfulness about school culture. This scholar and others (Deal & Peterson, 2016) assert that successful leaders, mainly those new to their schools, must invest time in understanding their school's culture before initiating changes. Engaging with stakeholders through conversations is one of the ways newly appointed principals can obtain information on what is happening, what stakeholders view as challenges, and how any proposed changes will be received (Grebenau, 2018). As discussed in Chapter six, promoting an open-door policy emerged as the medium for this conversational platform for these novice principals.

Ntozinhle and Mholi's narratives suggest that they encountered a toxic culture. Previous research has also found a toxic school culture in deprived schools (Chikoko et al., 2015;

Maringe et al., 2015; Naicker, 2018). Deal and Peterson (2016) and Gruenert and Whitaker (2019) describe toxic school culture as one associated with school dysfunctionality and lack of productivity (Deal & Peterson, 2016; Gruenert & Whitaker, 2019). Amongst other factors, dysfunctionality is influenced by low staff morale perpetuated by toxic stakeholders, who lead others into a collective mindset of disloyalty and suspicion (Gruenert & Whitaker, 2019). There is also a spiteful mindset, focus on individual needs, conflict among various factions, and distrust (Deal & Peterson, 2016; Gruenert & Whitaker, 2019). As expressed above, Ntozinhle and Mholi found themselves in two schools characterised by animosity and conflict, rooted in disputes over who is suitable for the principalship position and other senior posts.

Above and beyond the toxic culture in Ntozinhle's school, the presented narrative suggests that the school was a failing school or what Stoll and Fink (1996) describe as a sinking school. Sinking schools are ineffective and spiralling downward, making it challenging to initiate improvement efforts (Stoll & Fink, 1996). The dwindling enrolment and lack of faith in the school by the community are also indicators of sinking schools.

As newly appointed novice principals in their schools, upon encountering the toxic culture, Ntozinhle and Mholi focused on relationships for peacebuilding to understand the issues fuelling the conflicts, to think about how they could resolve these, and to reshape the toxic school culture. The experiences of Ubuntu and Maqhinga differed and are presented in the subsequent discussion.

7.3.2 Building Relationships to Turn the Tide

Unlike in Ntozinhle and Mholi's case, the situations in Ubuntu and Maqhinga's schools were not characterised by such a toxic culture. Having ascended to the principalship position within the same schools where they served, these two principals understood the prevailing culture. Both these principals had served as Acting Principals (APs) in their schools, with their appointments each taking them by surprise – see Ubuntu (Ascending the ranks, 5.4.6) and Maqhinga (Changing my mindset, 5.5.15). As APs, they had different experiences which influenced how they could turn the tide of their schools by improving the results.

Though brief, Maqhinga's experience as an AP enabled him to ride on the wave of his previous successes as a Departmental Head. Because of the timing of his appointment, it was much easier for him to continue to turn the tide by improving results. He stated, " *When I served as the AP, we tried to improve the results. We did not want to lose the momentum.*" Contrarily, as an AP, Ubuntu was under immense pressure to negotiate his new position and expectations

while also attempting to prove his capabilities as a potential principal candidate. He shared these sentiments:

I recalled the other thing that Umhloli (Circuit Education Specialist) had said, “you must maintain and keep the standard high.” Those words stuck on me like glue. No matter what I did, I knew I was a goner if I let that slip. In my two years as an AP, we slightly improved the matric results under challenging circumstances. Being an AP comes with its dynamics. Some see you as a caretaker and challenge you; some want you to prove yourself and have impossible expectations, and some support and help you. It is as if you are in limbo. You cannot make any drastic changes because you might be gone the next day, so you must tread lightly. So while I was visible, I also remained invisible. I let my deeds speak for me.

Although Mholi and Maqhinga had been APs in their schools before promotion, assuming the principalship presented them with a new terrain they had to navigate. Similarly, various scholars (Ng & Nzeto, 2015; Spillane et al., 2015) have found that, at times, the AP position does not shield one or provide immunity against the struggles of transitioning into principalship. Upon appointment as principals, Maqhinga and Ubuntu observed an element of stagnation and complacency with teachers’ and learners’ performance. In Ubuntu’s case, as mentioned above, the dynamics of being an AP constrained him in facilitating significant improvements. Additionally, once appointed, as stated in Chapter six, Ubuntu observed that some of the staff were comfortable with the status quo, adamant that there was no need for change, and even expressed resistance. Ubuntu was, however, discontent with the status quo of the school, observing that the current level of performance was not the best the school could achieve:

The school performance was at an acceptable level, according to the DBE. We were always in the region of 60 to 75%.

Maqhinga observed a similar kind of complacency. This can be evidenced by the pessimistic Physics teacher who initially believed it was impossible to pass the subject (see A teacher with an office, 5.5.18). However, in his case, the school was performing slightly better (see Changing my mindset, 5.5.15). Because Maqhinga had been in a top-performing school before, he envisaged the same performance for his learners. For this reason and the belief that learners and teachers could still improve performance in the school, he wanted to elevate the school’s performance. He stated the following in his acceptance speech:

I have a dream. I dream that if a Subject Advisor is sitting in their office and thinking about Accounting teachers in the District with about 300 schools, I want them to mention me in the top 5. So, let us stop seeing ourselves as less capable. Let us forget about ex-Model C schools. The teachers in those schools are exactly like us. We studied at the same university. The only difference is the buildings in which they teach. If they can get the As and perform the way they do, it is possible for us.

Maqhinga and Ubuntu's schools are what Stoll and Fink (1996) describe as cruising schools. These schools are technically effective based on accepted measures, but they hang on a thin thread because they do not continue to improve (Stoll & Fink, 1996). They have become ineffective for a significant percentage of the learners' population while riding on the high of a few academic achievers (Stoll & Fink, 1996). If left as they are, they may become sinking schools. For this reason, Maqhinga and Ubuntu build relationships to turn the tide of their schools.

Turning the tide was a tactful strategy to prevent the current situation from escalating to a point where the schools took a downward trend, creating a fertile ground for the growth of a toxic culture. Deal and Peterson (2016) state that culture needs to be consistently nurtured because it can turn toxic through a quick descent or a slow downward spiral. Given the implications, the principals' early diagnosis of the present situation is thus intuitive.

7.3.3 Drawing Support for Reshaping and Strengthening the School Culture

Though the situations of the schools were not the same, with Ntozinhle and Mholi encountering a toxic culture and Ubuntu and Maqhinga observing a precarious position of stagnation in their schools, the findings indicate that all the principals build relationships to draw the support to reshape and strengthen the school culture. They understood that any effort to reshape and strengthen the culture would need school stakeholders' full participation and endorsement.

The principal's approach to drawing the required support was guided by their outlook on putting people at the centre of their schools. A people-centered approach places value on human capital, and one of the ways to tap into this potential is through collegial relationships in schools. Ntozinhle mentioned valuing people to the extent of seeing them as assets. She stated, *"I see the people around me were assets."* Similarly, Maqhinga and Mholi believed that people and positive relationships were essential to lay the foundation for any improvement initiatives. They shared the following:

I am a relationship builder. The goal of building positive relationships drives all that I do. Relationships are sacred to me. If positive relationships are in place, the chances are that the rest will fall into place. (Maqhinga)

The school is not the building. It is the people in it. I have made sure to focus on people and building relationships. Once we have a healthy working environment, we can focus on what we must do within the school. We cannot provide a meaningful teaching and learning experience in an unhealthy schooling environment. (Mholi)

Ubuntu tapped into their shared history. This shared history became the glue that connected them. In his case, these connections were so deep that he described the relationship as a family.

We are a relatively small school, and I have tried to create a culture of sisterhood and brotherhood. Being at work is like being with your family. You quarrel, disagree, and get annoyed, but in the end, you reconcile because you are family. I feel that has worked for us. We have this unspoken kind of connectedness that gives us a shared purpose. Our connectedness has also made us realise that we have a shared history. The learners are our children. Without them, we will be jobless. We all need each other.

He further stated:

I am doing this (building relationships with external stakeholders as well) because the school is not an island. We need our community to support us and to feel that they are valued.

Fullan (2020) emphasizes the importance of relationships and leaders as relationship builders in leading change. He further asserts that leaders must be guided by a moral purpose attending to both the ends and means (Fullan, 2020). Explaining this, he states, “in education, an important end is to make a difference in the lives of students. But the means of getting to that end are also crucial” (p. 20). Moral purpose is further explained as “a dynamic process that requires purposeful collaboration and urges leaders to work on constantly developing relationships at all levels of the organization” (Fullan, 2020, p. 37).

As already mentioned, the process of reshaping and strengthening the culture is essential, and the principals would need the participation of all stakeholders. Relationships had intrinsic value in themselves; however, they were also purposeful for attaining resources. The principals build relationships through collaborations to identify these resources. In this case, the resources are the skills, knowledge, and talents of different stakeholders needed for reshaping and strengthening the culture. Below are the voices around this aspect:

From the onset, Ntozinhle was explicit about needing her team's skills to reshape the culture.

In my first address to the staff, I was honest. I told the team I needed their skills and talents to turn the school around. (Ntozinhle)

Similarly, Mholi, Ubuntu, and Maqhinga highly valued people and their potential contributions. Like Ntozinhle, these principals acted from an awareness that they did not possess all the answers and that working with others would assist in providing multiple solutions and resources. They stated the following:

It (building relationships and collaborating with others) assists me in identifying those with different talents and skills and then giving them the freedom to use them to achieve our school goals. I do not know everything. You must be a team player. The combined efforts of many are more significant than one person's effort. That is why teamwork and shared goals and vision are so important. (Mholi)

People have different abilities and capabilities, so drawing on this existing capital is crucial. Working with others is beneficial in that it increases the pool of resources. Through this, we have been able to start extra-curricular activities. This was a missing element, yet it is necessary for the holistic development of our learners. (Ubuntu)

I am not a jack of all trades, so I need their skills and input. I also don't have all the answers and solutions to our challenges. (Maqhinga)

Additionally, it also emerged that two principals (Maqhinga and Mholi) valued people and their participation because the spillover effect of this was collective ownership of the decisions taken.

I involve all stakeholders in decision-making. I am now accountable, and I must do things right. Involving people and working with others also helps me legitimize my decisions. (Mholi)

This (building relationships) has helped because we must all be accountable for our collective decisions. (Maqhinga)

In Ubuntu's case, his leadership was legitimised because he made sound decisions by collaborating with his critical friends. By extension, Maqhinga also benefited as he was part of this collaboration. He said, "*This has legitimized our leadership.*"

For these principals, building relationships through collaborations and other means served as a means of legitimizing decisions made. Participation and collaboration were used to ensure

ownership of such choices (Msila, 2013; Whitehead et al., 2013). In a study by Chikoko et al. (2015), principals leading schools in a deprived context reported collective ownership of decisions. This was facilitated by collaborating with others, and building relationships through mutual respect and trust characterised the cultures of these schools (Chikoko et al., 2015). A similar approach used by the novices in this study.

Reshaping and strengthening school culture is a complicated task. As mentioned above, observing and understanding the prevailing culture is critical. School leaders must also create and sustain positive stakeholder interactions (Deal & Peterson, 2016). “Human beings are at the heart of organizations,” and giving people space to participate can make them feel valued and usher in a positive culture where collegiality thrives (Turan & Bektas, 2013, p. 157). Collegiality cultivates a collective mindset essential for a positive culture. Grebenau (2018) asserts that novice leaders should not only share a vision but also involve and solicit the expertise of others in mutually enabling ways to achieve the schools’ goals. Collaborating with others aids in forming such collegial relationships essential for reshaping and strengthening the school culture.

The NPs also knew that school improvement would need all stakeholders’ buy-in and collective capital (Wieczorek & Manard, 2018). School improvement is one of the critical responsibilities of principals, with the expectation that they have to provide a broad range of skills and expertise to achieve this goal (Ghamrawi, 2013; Lai & Cheung, 2015; Nappi, 2014). Furthermore, schools in deprived contexts face multiple challenges (Chikoko et al., 2015; Maringe & Moletsane, 2015; Naicker, 2018) and thus need a range of skills and expertise to facilitate educational change and respond to these challenges (Ghamrawi, 2013; Lai & Cheung, 2015; Nappi, 2014). Looking for these skills and talents was thus imperative for the studied novice principals.

Additionally, the principals’ stance of looking within their community and harnessing resources through social relationships indicates an asset-based approach to leadership, which is perceived to be one of the practical approaches used by leaders of schools in a deprived context (Chikoko et al., 2015). It has been widely acknowledged that principals must work with others to provide a broad range of skills and expertise needed to facilitate educational change and respond to the various challenges imposed by their high work demands and, at times, the environments in which they work (Harris, 2009; Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2011; Nappi, 2014; Lai & Cheung, 2015). Therefore, principals must acknowledge the people within and beyond

the school as their primary assets and distribute leadership by engaging many people in leadership activities (Bush, 2007; Harris, 2004).

Being a novice leader shaped how they navigated this process of steering the culture. As external appointments, Ntozinhle and Maqhinga had to understand the prevailing culture. Maqhinga and Ubuntu, as internal appointments, faced different situations inherited from being APs. What was common was the potential threat of the schools' conditions digressing into a level of toxicity that would be highly challenging to unturn. Such indicators were already apparent in Mholi and Ntozinhle's schools that were charged with conflict. In Maqhinga and Ubuntu's schools, a culture of laxity was slowly mushrooming. If left unchecked, this laxity may create a fertile ground for toxic culture, thus creating the need for Maqhinga and Ubuntu to attempt to improve the current conditions (Spillane et al., 2015). Whatever the situation, improvements and reshaping and strengthening the school culture is a means for novice principals to stamp their presence as newly appointed leaders and are thus necessary for those selected internally and externally.

Beyond this, the context of deprivation further influenced the principals in leaning toward building relationships to strengthen and reshape the school culture. The schools were either cruising or sinking. The principals contend with multiple demands at the intersection of context and being a novice. This places complex demands on them as they have to reshape and strengthen the school culture and repair the school's legitimacy under tight timelines while simultaneously establishing their legitimacy as a new principal (Spillane et al., 2015). The novice principals thus build relationships to understand their schools' cultures. They also developed collegial relationships because they valued people and their potential contributions to their schools through their knowledge, values, and skills that would aid in reshaping and strengthening the school culture.

7.4 The Office as a Safe Space for Dialogue

In the previous theme, I touched on moral purpose, emphasizing the importance of both process and outcomes. The findings of this study indicate that the principals opened their offices to staff and learners alike by adopting an open-door policy, that being the process in this instance. While ensuring accessibility was one of the intentions, the novice principals had deeper intentions for this approach. These intentions are the outcomes of this process which will be elaborated on below. The following sentiments were shared:

Observing the multiple challenges faced by the learners, Ubuntu needed first-hand information to diagnose the challenges and, from this diagnosis, craft appropriate responses to resolve them.

I get this kind of information from having an open-door policy and communicating with the learners. Once I understand the learner's situation, we can extend and direct support tailored to their needs. We do not ignore these stories when they come to us. We act on them.

Although Maqhinga did not explicitly state that he adopted an open-door policy, his narrative suggests that he was accessible to learners and staff alike. This accessibility made him approachable for stakeholders to share information and confide in him.

I remember a girl who came to me and told me she had a boil in her thigh near her vaginal area. When the female teachers asked her what was wrong, she told them she had told me about it. They were livid. For them, this kind of information should not be discussed with a principal who is a man. That is the kind of society we live in. To me, she is a child; it doesn't matter. The same applies to the teachers. They come and tell me about serious personal challenges because they can trust me.

Through the open-door policy and being accessible, Ntozinhle identified a team of like-minded allies she could rely on to support various activities.

From what I have heard, this office was a no-go zone. When I engaged with individuals in my office, I realized that others were more committed and wanted to support me. They are my allies. If I know I want things done and there is a looming deadline, I will call on them. I know they are on board, and all we do is for our learners at the end of the day. I trust them, and they have not let me down thus far. I do get judgment about this. I have been accused of favouritism.

These narratives suggest that the principals' accessibility and the open-door policy achieved multiple objectives. First, the office became a safe space. Secondly, it became a place for interpersonal conversations and information sharing. Thirdly, it was a site where they could obtain additional resources by identifying allies. According to Grebenau (2018), a successful leader will create opportunities for interpersonal conversations and dialogue in a designated area. This will elevate this designated area into a safe environment or space where people can freely and safely engage and share concerns (Grebenau, 2018). In this study, novice principals made their office spaces safe to engage and converse with others.

Their actions further demonstrate their understanding of social spaces and how they may enable or inhibit communication. Shortt (2015) believes some people may struggle to speak freely in open spaces such as staffrooms or meetings. Creating an alternate safe space accommodates these individuals who may otherwise not provide or share their inputs. Lastly, dialogue takes place without prescription in a safe space and is driven by informal conversations. Grebenau (2018) cautions that talks in such spaces may evoke complicated feelings and negative feedback, as evident in the shared voices. However, these conversations can also reap emotional support, innovative ideas, and shared learning (Pataraiia et al., 2014; Thomson, 2015; Van Lankveld et al., 2014), laying the foundations for collegial relationships to foster.

7.5 Either I “Sink or Swim”: I Choose to Learn the Job

The findings of this study show that novice principals took an interest in their professional development. In Chapter six, we learned that two principals (Ubuntu and Maqhinga) forged a critical friendship between themselves and others to aid their learning and professional development. Ntozinhle relied on a mentor for her professional development. The principals invested in their professional development for multiple reasons. They cited isolation, the pressures of taking the helm from the first day of appointment in the absence of support, and insufficient professional development opportunities by the DBE. Though these were significant factors, overall, the novice principals wanted to be able to capacitate themselves through professional development and learn the job. Their voices are presented below:

In the theme Building relationships to turn the tide (7.3.2), we learn about Maqhinga’s tenure as an AP. The paradox in Maqhinga’s experience is that, while he could still ride on the waves of his success as an AP when he was appointed, there was a shift in the attitudes of those he led. Maqhinga shared his anxiousness and the swift change of expectations once he was appointed:

All of a sudden, I was very anxious and uncertain. I lost some sleep. I can’t explain it, but I can say that being an AP and being a principal is different. When I was appointed, the expectations of people increased. It’s as if they expected me to be someone else – people I used to seek advice from suddenly expected that I had all the answers. I felt isolated, like I was no longer part of the team. I was pretty shocked. Being a principal did challenge me, and it continues to do so. I am still learning.

The feelings of isolation, anxiety, and pressure of novice principals are not unfounded (Bolam et al., 2000; Daresh & Male, 2000; Kitavi & van der Westhuizen, 1997; Spillane & Lee, 2014).

Maqhinga's experience suggests his peers no longer saw him as one of their own. Loder and Spillane (2005) state that entering the principalship position changes social relationships. Colleagues no longer perceive principals as teachers because of the status attached to this role (Loder & Spillane, 2005). Similarly, Spillane and Lee (2014) state that teachers become distant and more cautious of school leaders, leaving them in a state of professional isolation and loneliness. The experience shared by Maqhinga explains why he sought critical friends who were principals. He narrates experiencing loneliness, isolation, and increased pressure to perform on the job by providing leadership. In the excerpt below, he further explains this pressure:

There is an expectation that you can't say that you don't know or have an answer. Some problems have been here for years, and some teachers have been in the school from the beginning. But when I was appointed, these people would come to me with these long-standing issues wanting solutions.

As shared in Chapter six, his critical friends supported him and guided his decision-making. Unlike Maqhinga, Ntozinhle's situation was more precarious because she had no prior leadership experience. She knew this would cast aspersions on her and raise questions about the agenda behind her appointment. Therefore, she sought a mentor to aid her learning.

There was a lot of curiosity around my appointment. The staff had already learned I was not in a management position. I knew they would not take me seriously if they realized how little I knew.

Additionally, she was new to the school, and the events leading up to her appointment had not been smooth sailing. Given her trajectory, we can infer that Ntozinhle experienced a similar sense of loneliness and isolation as Maqhinga. As such, a mentor would provide professional development in addition to companionship. It has already been evidenced that all principals are expected to lead from day one. In Maqhinga's narrative presented above, we learn of the sudden shift in expectations, even from those he previously sought counsel. Ntozinhle expressed a similar experience of being thrown into the deep end from day one. Below she narrates her experience in this regard. She had to learn the job to keep afloat and swim.

On day one, when I arrived at work, there was a knock at the door. I had to learn, and I had to learn fast. I had to shift gears. "*Manje Thisha Omkhulu* (Principal, this and that)," *kuze kube imanje* (up until today). There was no time to settle in. That morning I was given

documents that had to be submitted to the circuit, and that was that. No one was interested that I had just moved from post-level one, and no one was interested in my newness.

While the expectation is to take the helm, preparation in the form of induction is not prioritised. All principals shared that they attended induction only months after their appointment. Finding ways to develop oneself is thus crucial for novice principals to keep afloat. As such, the principals in this study took it upon themselves to find ways to learn the job. These are their experiences on induction which influenced them to be agents of their professional growth.

From Ubuntu's story (Ascending the ranks, 5.4.6), we learn that there was no induction or support when he was appointed as an AP, even though the school had no other SMT members at that time. Ubuntu shared this experience:

I expected the Umhloli (CES) would come and induct me and offer support, given that she was aware that the senior DH had left and there was no other SMT member.

Ubuntu further shared the handover experience from DH to AP, describing this as “*brief and uninspiring*.” When he was appointed, the issue of induction was still not prioritised:

Even when I was appointed permanently, there was still no induction. I was notified that I had been appointed, and the CES came to inform the school community formally about my appointment. I have not been inducted.

Maqhinga shared a similar experience as Ubuntu. He stated, “*I got introduced formally as the school's new principal. There was no induction. You have to learn the job as you do it.*”

Unlike Maqhinga and Ubuntu, Ntozinhle and Mholi did receive induction. However, it happened after they had resumed their duties, and it was not comprehensive. They said the following:

I received an appointment letter and assumed my duties. There was no other preparation. I attended a two-day induction workshop two and a half months after I had resumed my duties. It was basic. It didn't serve the purpose. I had been exposed to the things that were covered on the job. (Mholi)

In Ntozinhle's story, we learn of the trials and tribulations around her appointment. Unlike Mholi, who always had the ambition to lead, Ntozinhle did not. What was common is that both had been appointed from post-level one to post-level four, and they received induction after they had resumed their duties. Below, Ntozinhle explains the handover to her role.

After I finished, *Umhloli* (CES) gave me a handshake. I was introduced to the learners, and immediately, he left me. He did not even stay for the tea. *Ngasala kanjalo "nesikole sami."* (That is how I was left with the school). The Acting Principal showed me the office and walked me through the school. People had tea and left. I had to take on my new role, Ntozinhle, the principal. I only received induction three months after being appointed. It was over a couple of days and very general. I left there not gaining much and still underprepared.

The principals' narratives evidence that priority is not given to the induction of newly appointed principals. This is not an isolated case, as illustrated by the experiences of Ubuntu and Maqhinga, who did not receive induction. It is unknown if there is an assumption that serving as APs is seen as sufficient preparation. However, as APs, they have shared that the dynamics were different, and even in this position, they had to find means to navigate their new leadership roles.

Bush and Oduro (2006) have observed that novice principals resume their duties without engaging in an effective induction process, findings confirmed by the current study. When induction is provided, like in the case of Mholi and Ntozinhle, it is often a once-off event occurring just before or after the principal takes up the post (Bush, 2018). This induction is generic, not customised to the needs of the principals or the school, and tends to focus on administrative issues around procedures and reporting (Bush, 2018). Bush (2018, p. 69) states, "in the absence of effective induction, principals may be left to sink or swim."

Bristol et al. (2014) state that the socialisation of NPs aids the process of transitions or the rites of passage and is essential to consolidate their membership in the fraternity. In some instances, especially in contexts where there are no formal sources of socialisation, some NPs resort to informal sources (Mentz et al., 2010; Pineda-Báez et al., 2019), such as those found in this study. These scholars assert that there is value in these informal networks, as formal programmes tend to focus on managerial aspects and do not emphasize other instructional components and issues of school culture. They argue that informal networks embrace principals' personal and professional connections with others in such configurations. As such, they value them for the socialisation of novice principals.

Maqhinga, Ubuntu, and Ntozinhle mentioned other opportunities that were offered for professional development. These were mainly in the form of workshops provided occasionally.

They further commented that these had a broad focus, lacking contextual relevance. Maqhinga said, *“sometimes, we have workshops for training. These workshops are for all principals.”*

The opportunities for professional development in the DBE are scarce. Occasionally we get training, but it is generic and, most of the time, lacks practicability. It is not relevant because it does not capacitate us to deal with the challenges we face in our leading schools. (Ubuntu)

There is no attempt to develop newly appointed, novice principals on how to lead as principals. Collectively, we are called to a meeting, and what happens there is that you get scolded. When we are called to a workshop, we are asked about administrative things: have you submitted this document, payroll issues, and so on. There are those on managing school finances workshops, but nothing is directed at cultivating leadership skills for novice principals. One has to fend for themselves and navigate the challenges. (Ntozinhle)

The findings that emerge are that the confluence of factors such as isolation, ineffective induction, or lack thereof, and the sparse availability of professional development opportunities influence the principals to find alternate ways to develop themselves professionally. Bush (2018) states that professionals are entitled to such opportunities. He asserts that as professionals move from teaching to school leadership, it is their right to be developed for their new roles; it is “a moral obligation” (Bush, 2018, p.68). While this is the expectation, we learn that such provisions are not made, and the principals take the initiative to seek opportunities to learn the job. The theme below discusses internal and external factors that threaten the principals’ leadership.

7.6 Rocked by the Rogue Waves

From the analysis of narratives, it emerged that novice principals faced challenges that resulted in the loss of instructional time. In Chapter six, I discussed their strategies to navigate this loss. In this chapter, I discuss how these challenges manifested, making it necessary for the principals to mitigate the loss of instructional time. In this study, it was found that both external and internal factors influenced this loss. No matter the source, these were like rogue waves rocking the schools and creating an adverse situation of taking away from time on task. Internally, poor planning and ill-discipline were cited. The principals cited community protests, transport challenges, and logistical inefficiencies as external factors.

Poor planning compromised instructional time in Mholi and Ntozinhle’s schools. They shared the following:

When I arrived, I observed that a lot of time was wasted because things happened haphazardly. This troubled me because I value and respect time. I knew that the time that was wasted was taking away from instructional time, and I had to change this culture of laxity towards time. (Mholi)

I observed that a lot of time was wasted on meetings and other activities because there was poor communication regarding what was needed and when it was required. There were no mechanisms to recover the time lost, so it had to stop. (Ntozinhle)

For these principals, the focus on protecting instructional time was driven by the need to recover the time lost by poor planning and mitigate further losses. Ubuntu mentioned ill-discipline as one of the factors that detracted from teaching and learning, thus resulting in a loss of instructional time:

We deal with trivial matters. A learner will wear the full school uniform and then have a hat on, knowing it is not allowed. When you get to class, you waste substantial time trying to get them to settle down. When you start teaching, they will begin taking out their books, and some do not even have them. When they have to take notes, some will ask to go and borrow a pen. Therefore, much teaching time is wasted and wasted on trivial issues. These are our day-to-day struggles.

Ubuntu commented that the learner's environment influenced their behaviour patterns.

Some learners are just not used to a routine and are used to a dysfunctional environment. Others act up because they have internalized the toxic things they have been told. Others want attention and recognition, and misbehaving is one of the ways they can get this.

Maqhinga also mentioned discipline issues while not fixating on the point. Instead, as did Ubuntu, he diagnosed the root causes. This broader analysis influenced his approach. His approach focused on assisting the learners in learning and adapting to a more positive routine. However, others had different perspectives and approaches, placing a lot of focus on discipline to the detriment of teaching and learning.

I don't exaggerate the issue of discipline. We do have kids that are unruly and ill-disciplined. I am aware of it, and I know it has negative implications...The sad reality is that most learners come from "broken" families. They have never been taught discipline. We cannot crucify them for that. All we can do is teach them discipline. Unfortunately, this is my personal view on these issues. Other teachers don't see things the way I do. They focus on these to the detriment of teaching and learning.

Maqhinga and Ubuntu also shared external challenges. Maqhinga cited community protests and strikes as factors that constantly affected attendance:

Community protests and public transport strikes result in losing instructional time. For example, last year, we had an incident where we could not come to school for over two weeks due to a public transport strike and a fight over routes in the area. As a result, a lot of teaching and learning time was lost. This was not an isolated event.

Both Maqhinga and Ubuntu also mentioned transport constraints. These made it difficult to extend the school day and recover lost time. However, Ubuntu, who had partnered with the taxi association (see Working with others, 5.4.11), was able to mediate this challenge. Maqhinga voiced the following:

One of the challenges we face is regarding transport constraints. We can't have morning or afternoon classes because our learners and teachers travel with standard transport that drops them off and picks them up at a particular time. It arrives at 8:00 and leaves at 14:30.

Ubuntu mentioned late coming as a challenge. The late coming was not deliberate but a product of some of the learners' circumstances. These challenges resonated with him as he also had taken on domestic duties at a young age. He stated:

Other issues may be insignificant elsewhere, but here they affect us. Learners come late because some have to travel long distances. Others have to do chores in the morning, and others have to drop off their children at crèche and many other issues. As a principal, I need to be empathetic to these issues. They are obstacles to our learners. I once was that learner who had the same burdens of chores and travelling a long distance to get to school. So, I know what they are going through.

Logistical inefficiencies relating to the delays in the food supply for the feeding scheme also posed a threat to instructional time. Maqhinga made the following comment:

Our kids rely on school nutrition. If there are glitches, you find that we have to knock off early. Sometimes these glitches are because the service provider fails to deliver as expected.

Protecting instructional time is vital in deprived contexts, given that multiple factors may take away from time on task. In a study about principals and how they do and act on policy while leading deprived schools, Bayeni (2018) found that instructional time was reduced because teachers were sent out to run administrative errands, such as going to the resource centre to

print during school hours. Khambule et al. (2019) and Faulkner (2015) reported protests over service delivery as typical in deprived contexts. As shown, the implications for schools are school closures during these periods, resulting in the loss of instructional time. Abadzi (2009) found that, in developing countries, substantial time is lost on insignificant activities like handing out and collecting books, doing chores like sweeping and copying notes, a point raised by Ubuntu and Maqhinga. Findings from the 2018 Teaching and Learning International Survey are also that locally, time on task is compromised, and teachers spend only about 66% of allocated time on teaching and learning (OECD, 2019). These findings further state that these losses are more pronounced in schools with a large population of students from socioeconomically disadvantaged homes than in schools with low concentrations of such learners (OECD, 2019).

The findings of this study support previous research on the loss of instructional time in disadvantaged schools. To some extent, these findings illustrate that context significantly affects this loss. As described above, some of these issues that take away from the instructional time are external, while others may be internal. As already stated, factors that result in the loss of instructional time are not desirable, making it necessary for principals to make some attempts to arrest these issues and recover the lost time.

7.7 Contexts are Prejudiced

The findings of this study reveal that the context shaped the principals' leadership practices. While this has already been alluded to, in this theme, I discuss the intricacies relating to the context and illustrate why they shaped the principals' leadership practices in the way they do. The context of deprivation is prejudiced. Prejudiced contexts are environments with "predictable, systematic, social and economic inequalities in experience and outcomes based on people's social group memberships" (Murphey et al., 2018, p.66). As has been explained, in deprived contexts, multiple factors collude in various ways creating a toxic environment for those who live and work in these communities (Lumby, 2015; Maringe et al., 2015). The principals shared socioeconomic challenges prominent in the context and contextually inherent deprivation features as powerful drivers influencing leadership practices.

Mholi mentioned the lack of parental care as a significant challenge experienced by the school's learners. This reality shaped his leadership approach. He said:

The challenge that still makes me cry is when I realize that a learner comes from a home with no love. The learner is not taken care of, not given food for days, is not bathing, and not having a school uniform. That kind of problem makes me cry. We still experience learners who stay with aunts, uncles, or grandparents who neglect them.

Ntozinhle cited a similar pattern of neglect. Though Ntozinhle had come from an impoverished background, she grew up in a family where she was loved and cared for. When appointed, she observed that most learners had home backgrounds where care and love were minimal. This was a new experience for her, taking her aback. Consequently, the environment demanded a different approach from the one she had known. She shared the following:

I was shocked and taken aback when I arrived here. Our kids lack the basics. They have torn uniforms. Some have no uniform. Some come to school dirty...Our learners come from impoverished backgrounds. Almost 90% do not have parents; they are orphans. They live with their grandparents. Those who do have parents have parents who live in the city. When you ask for a parent, you expect a child to come to the school but become dismayed when the grandparents have to come here, limping or with a walking stick.

Ntozinhle also shared how the mentioned issues impacted what she could or could not do. She provided a comparative analysis of how the different contexts in which she has worked required adaptability. Drawing from her experience of teaching in primarily middle-class schools as opposed to her current school context, she shared this view:

There are things I could do at my previous school that I can't do here, no matter how wonderful those initiatives can be. The lifestyle there was different.

Similarly, Ubuntu highlighted the social ills inherent in the environment. In his comment, he also touched on the challenge of parental support. He stated:

There are many social ills in the environment from which our learners come. Some learners come from child-headed homes, some are neglected, and some have parents who are alcoholics who abuse them. Some have been raped and impregnated by uncles or their mother's boyfriends; a learner will be absent when they are menstruating because they do not have sanitary towels. The parents/guardians absolve all responsibilities to the school once they have enrolled the learner.

Maqhinga mentioned multiple identities, including being a father. Past experiences shaped these identities, but they were also shaped by environmental factors such as absent fathers plaguing the community he led. He said, "*The reality is we live in a world with absent fathers.*"

For some, I am the closest person they have to a father figure... We also have a high prevalence of teenage pregnancy.”

The principals’ voices indicate that they can locate various forms of prejudice in the deprived context. According to Murphey et al. (2018), identifying prejudice within places positions people to align their practices with those impacted by bringing attention to the overlooked causes of social inequality and finding novel ways to mitigate and reduce the disparities, as discussed in Chapter six. The principals’ narratives suggest that they understand that schools reflect the communities from which they attract learners, and with deprivation, in particular, a plethora of factors collude to create toxic school environments, as has already been mentioned (Lumby, 2015; Wool et al., 2015).

These findings also support previous research which links schools located in deprived contexts with socioeconomic challenges. Literature (see Chikoko et al., 2016; Faulkner, 2015) shows a high prevalence of child-headed homes in deprived contexts, particularly in KZN (GHS, 2018). Poor parental involvement has also been cited as a defining characteristic of some schools located in deprived contexts (Taylor & Yu, 2009). Some learners from these homes live precarious lives due to lack and vulnerability (Faulkner, 2015), a similar finding emerging in this study. The precariousness of learners’ well-being is sometimes compromised to the point that some learners find themselves in a position where they have to “sell themselves or starve” (Faulkner, 2015, p. 427). As a consequence of such challenges and many others, Lumby (2015) posits that principals in deprived contexts find themselves having to secure the current and future rights and well-being of learners through education in a context where these rights are explicitly denied.

7.8 Policy-related Challenges and Leadership

The findings reveal that the principals, as active policy enactors, implemented policies based on various factors. Some of the factors influencing the policy process were beyond the sphere of influence of the principals, externally located. Others were internal factors, and principals had to find ways to work within these situations and the complexities that resulted from them. The prominent issues affecting the policy process were insufficient funding, admission policy complexities, and the procurement process led by SGBs. Consequentially, implementing policies was a contested terrain. Their voices are presented below:

Upon arrival, Ntozinhle had to navigate a peculiar situation of two Departmental Heads (DHs) occupying one acting post. She had to work within the parameters of this inherited situation, even though she knew that departmental policies did not endorse it. Evidencing this, she stated:

Currently, two individuals are acting as Departmental Heads (DHs) in the same post. I know that isn't very clear, but it was like that when I arrived. The CES is aware of this as well. I was told there is union involvement and advised not to get involved.

This finding supports previous research (Chikoko et al., 2015; Faulkner, 2015; Naicker, 2018) on deprived schools having a high level of unionisation, which at times undermines and weakens internal decision-making processes. The extent of union power can also reach and influence the external structures; as Ntozinhle explained, the CES was aware of the issue she faced, yet it was not addressed. Ntozinhle mentioned how this created an adverse working environment, fuelling conflict amongst the acting DHs and those that were part of the different support factions of the two individuals, exacerbating conflict, as already described in the Relationships for Peace Building (pp.185-187). Seeing the rise in tensions, she had to intervene. She stated:

They are at loggerheads. You know, the office you were sitting in is supposed to be occupied by the DH but is now vacant. I requested they not occupy it because if the other comes in first, the one that comes in after will accuse them of leaving *imithi* (witchcraft things). They will then speak to their alliances, which escalates into a wildfire. So, I just asked that they work in their classes instead because they cannot tolerate each other.

Another issue that emerged was the issue of floor space. Two principals (Mholi and Maqhinga) mentioned limitations resulting in overcrowded classes:

Our classes are overcrowded, and we lack floor space. A teacher cannot even move around the classroom. (Maqhinga)

Similarly, Mholi said:

We have a lack of floor space, and our classes are overcrowded. We have desks that accommodate two learners, but learners have to sit in threes, or we have to join them together into a whole row so they can sit. If one needs to go to the bathroom and is seated in the middle, the entire row must move and shift, causing disruptions to the lesson. Our learner–teacher ratio is too high.

Two issues emerge from these narratives: overcrowded classrooms and a high learner-teacher ratio. On the latter, there is a notion that this is regulated by policy and should be 35 learners to 1 teacher (Nkosi, 2022). In a recent response to parliamentary written questions, the current Minister of Basic Education, Angie Motshekga, stated that there are currently no legislated norms and standards for learner-teacher ratio in South African public schools (Nkosi, 2022). She stated that this is an ideal measure that the basic education sector was striving to achieve but was unable to do so due to the availability of classroom space, school size, and dense learner populations in some geographic regions, among other factors (Nkosi, 2022).

While only ideal guidelines exist in this regard, what is stipulated per Norms and Standards for Public School Infrastructure (Republic of South Africa, 2013) is that the minimum space allocated in a classroom is 1m² for learners and 7m² for teaching from grades 1 to 12. Though the principals did not provide constraints regarding these specific sizes, as mentioned above, the classrooms were overcrowded, which is not ideal. Policy ambiguity may explain the status quo in deprived contexts, with overcrowded classrooms being a norm in these schools (Bayeni, 2018; Naicker, 2018; Maringe et al., 2015).

The study also found that the principals could not maintain the infrastructure of their schools. Though funds were allocated for this function, guided by the Norms and Standards for Funding, this study found that the allocation was insufficient. The principals had to deviate from the guidelines stipulated for expenditure. They could not refurbish and maintain dilapidated buildings and meet the school's day-to-day needs. Their voices are presented below:

We are a Section 21 school without certain functions. The major problem is the funding per learner. That is where the problem starts... Even when the funds are allocated, it is prescribed how they should be spent. For example, 60% should be spent on textbooks and stationery; 20% can go towards office stationery and other teacher-learner support materials, and the remaining 20% is for the day-to-day running of the school... This 20% must also pay for electricity, which is also very expensive. Some schools owe the municipality hundreds of thousands for electricity, yet the funds are about R50 000-R60 000. This is just not enough. You end up having to cut costs and prioritise. Some of the renovations we need are fixing broken windows, doors, and toilets... Renovations are expensive; unfortunately, we cannot afford to do them. (Ubuntu)

Mholi expressed how the current situation was historical and would need substantial resources. He said:

As you can see, the general infrastructure is dilapidated. Some things are how they were when I was still in this school as a boy. Refurbishing such damage is massive, as some things have deteriorated beyond repair. We cannot afford to renovate the buildings because the school allocation from the government is insufficient for the school's basic needs.

Maqhinga described the state of the school. Like the other principals, he knew the current conditions were unacceptable.

We lack basic amenities like running water. We use a Jojo tank as a water supply. Sometimes there is no water, and we bring water from home. We still have pit toilets, and as you can smell, something unsanitary is happening there. I have reached out to a local organization for a donation to get the necessary chemicals for the toilets. The classrooms are not in good condition. There are broken doors and windows, and the furniture has seen better days. The school budget is constrained, and we are struggling. These things are a priority, but we cannot prioritize them. (Maqhinga)

Ntozinhle shared similar sentiments:

The windows and doors are broken. The toilets are broken. We don't have enough furniture in the classrooms. There is no conducive space for learners to sit during breaks. We don't have a library. There are expectations that I must do something about it. At present, there are no funds for this. (Ntozinhle)

As mentioned above, the financial resources obtained were meagre. Another finding was that these were not used resourcefully due to complexities in the procurement process led by the SGBs. The Schools African Schools Act (SASA) prescribes the functions of SGBs and mandates this structure to manage financial resources (Republic of South Africa, 1996). According to Bush and Heystek (2003), effective financial management should ensure that expenditure is fruitful by utilising funds to ensure value for money. As mentioned by Ubuntu, there is a prescription on how the funds should be used. In public schools, the use of funds is also guided by the Public Finance Management Act (PFMA) to ensure transparency, accountability, and sound financial management in government and public institutions (Republic of South Africa, 1999). Against this backdrop, the principals stated the following:

Maqhinga shared how the SGB colluded for the appointment of service providers who did not provide quality service. Stating this, he said:

The issue of appointing service providers is problematic. I am part of the SGB, but I have seen that others caucus against me to get their preferred supplier appointed. This preference

is not based on the supplier having expertise. Some members make side deals with the suppliers to get a share. When you explain procurement processes, they disregard this.

Ntozinhle added on the lack of accountability from the SGB and the suppliers themselves. She mentioned the following:

There is also a tendency for the service providers to do a shoddy job. These windows have just been repaired, but they have fallen off. When you report at the SGB meeting and tell them that we cannot appoint that person again, they think you are a gatekeeper. I take before and after pictures for evidence because I have had three incidents like that already. This is not just an issue with the local suppliers. For example, when the stationery order arrived, there were things we did not order, and some things had defects (pens that didn't work, dry glue, calculators that didn't work, etc.). When it has been delivered, no one accounts for these defects. You escalate the issue but never get any feedback.

She also shared the challenge of going from pillar to post to get quotations. She said:

The SGBs will recommend suppliers and service providers. When you request the quote, it is shabby, or you must run after the supplier to provide it. Sometimes, it is just thumb sucked, and you see cement being quoted at R2 000 a bag. You now have to contact them and explain the issue of PFMA. Getting the three quotes becomes a mission. I understand that we must work with local communities and support this stance. However, our suppliers also need to up their game.

In Ntozinhle and Maqhing's narrative, we learn that, unlike other principals who lack the willingness to share power in financial management (Rangongo et al., 2016), they work collaboratively with SGBs as envisioned by the SASA (Myende et al., 2018; Republic of South Africa, 1996). While embracing this approach, they face hurdles that have also been reported in the discourse on financial management at schools. Scholars have cited the causes of financial mismanagement. Issues such as lack of ethics, accountability, and trustworthiness (Rangongo et al., 2016); poor financial management skills and expertise (Mestry, 2006; Munge et al., 2016; Rangongo et al., 2016); deviations from prescribed financial guidelines during the implementation process (Edmund et al., 2018); and in some cases poor accountability measures in cases of non-compliance (Rangongo et al., 2016). These issues are apparent in the principals' narratives and consequentially taint the SGBs who ought to stand in a position of trust towards the school by promoting the best interests and being accountable (Naidoo & Mestry, 2017; Republic of South Africa, 1996). Additionally, the ineffective use of resources results in wasteful expenditure, halting improvement efforts, as stated by principals. As stated by

Ntozinhle, the issue of fruitless expenditure is also apparent externally in the provincial departments that provide the services on behalf of Section 20 and some Section 21 schools.

While cognisant of the challenges mentioned above in working with SGBs, the principals also reiterated the earlier point of insufficient funding. Stating this, they said:

I agree that SGBs need training for their roles. But we must also be realistic. No matter how skilled you are, there is nothing you can do if the funds are not sufficient. (Mholi)

The challenge of financial management is not just at the grassroots level. The budgets we make are a wish list. Every level wants to pass the buck, and I think the SGB is the low-hanging fruit. They get blamed for financial mismanagement when the needed things are unaffordable within the budget. (Ubuntu)

In all the schools, the funding constraint was further exacerbated by incorrect enrolment numbers. These arose for various reasons, as illustrated below. No matter the source of the issue, the implications were that the resources allocated were not based on the actual numbers in the school. The principals expressed this problem as follows:

This issue of data being collected about schools and not being used is killing us... There is an issue with our enrolment numbers. We have been requesting the Department to adjust them, but to date, it has not been done. We have an X amount of learners but the paper states otherwise and reflects a lower enrolment. This has implications for the funding we receive. It also has implications for staffing and the provision of meals. It is very problematic. We have conveyed this to the CES, but it has not been adjusted accordingly. (Mholi)

Two principals (Ubuntu and Maqhinga) shared how their schools' locality influenced how they implemented the admission policy. As mentioned, the location meant they were not schools of choice due to poor accessibility. To ensure the school had the enrolment numbers to retain teachers, these principals enrolled learners outside the prescripts of departmental policy. Explaining this dynamic, they stated:

Here we accept any child with a report. Most of the learners we admit have been expelled, and some have been out of the system because they dropped out. Sometimes we take learners without reports and birth certificates. The policy does not endorse this. We need those numbers to ensure that PPN is covered and the teachers' posts are secured.

Sharing a similar dynamic relating to admission policy, Ubuntu stated:

We are the “scrap yard” school. This term might seem negative, but I use it because we are called the scrap yard school. Learners who have been suspended and ex-dropouts come here for a second chance. In a meeting, the CES said that if a principal can see that a learner is likely to drop out, they must advise them to come to this school. We admit any learner that comes even when they do not have the required documentation. We also know we are not the school of choice, so we have to admit to maintain numbers for PPN. We are allocated funds according to the number of learners that we enrol.

As mentioned above, these principals share similar contextual constraints that influenced their admission policy implementation to maintain their educator Post Establishment Norms (PPN).

Ntozinhle also shared a similar challenge of documentation for learner enrolment. Stating this, she said:

Remember I stated that the learners live with grandparents. A grandparent will come and admit a learner without a birth certificate or a report. When we check on SA-SAMS, there is no previous record of the learner, yet they were in school. Some even bring evidence in the form of schoolbooks of the prior year or term. Sometimes, the parent will keep these documents and not give them to the grandparent, so they can continue getting the grant money from SASSA. Sometimes, the grandparent does not even know where the parent is because the parent will leave the learner after the holidays, only never to return. There are a lot of stories.

There are also contradictions in the principals’ experiences, with Mholi emphasizing the implication of insufficient resource allocation. Contrarily, Maqhinga and Ubuntu had a similar issue but could still secure the posts in their schools. All the principals shared that the CES was aware of this practice, which had become normalized as it emphasized that learners should not be denied admittance. While this stance was understandable, as it was beyond the learners’ control, it is unclear how this practice yielded different outcomes. In their study, Bayeni and Bhengu (2018) found that CES’s were more concerned with the submission of reports for compliance and not the legitimacy of the submissions. The lack of monitoring created space for hollow compliance, allowing schools to choose which policies to observe and which to ignore (Bayeni & Bhengu, 2018). This could explain why the same processes yielded different outcomes for these principals.

Mholi also mentioned inadequate learner transport. The learner transport policy was introduced to ensure “safe, decent, effective, integrated, and sustainable learner transport and to service in rural those communities experience transportation challenges in accessing educational centres”

(Republic of South Africa, 2015, p. 14). Mholi's school is a beneficiary of the programme. As shared below, there are some issues with the service provision.

Our learners come from remote areas, and we need more provisions in terms of learner transport. The DBE has provided us with three buses. We need three more, at least. The allocation is not even based on the incorrect enrolment numbers I mentioned. The learners travel uncomfortably, squashed, and one of the buses has to take two loads. The buses are filled above the loading capacity. This has significant safety implications. Sometimes the buses are late, or there is a breakdown. The learners have to walk and get to school tired; some don't come because the terrain is unsafe for travelling on foot, especially for the young.

Mholi raises a serious concern because the service offered is supposed to adhere to road traffic regulations (Republic of South Africa, 2015). At present, as demonstrated in his narrative, this is not possible. The safety issue, in this case, is beyond the school and the transport provider, raising concerns about who accounts in the case of an unfortunate incident. The concern is, however, more on the safety of learners using this transport.

Overall, the principals expressed dissatisfaction with the one-size-fits-all approach to policy. They commented that, though they desired to implement policies, the contexts in which they led meant that, at times, policies had to either lead beyond the policy or contextualize them.

The reality is that our policies are not tailored to speak to our circumstances. The policy has specific stipulations that we cannot enforce because of the systematic challenges we operate under. (Mholi)

The policies do not serve our needs. If I were to force them, the regulations and the policy would not assist me because they are not compelled to do some of the things they do. It is all about trying to motivate them continually, acknowledging the work that they do, and showing them appreciation. (Ubuntu)

We must enrol learners, but the teachers must teach in overcrowded classrooms. When they bring this up, the issue of PPN comes up. I don't think policy guidelines are considerate of the different environments. (Maqhinga)

The findings in this theme support the view of policy being a living organism brought to life, "struggled over, not delivered, in tablets of stone" as it moves through the system (Ogza, 2000, p. 1). They also reveal the complexities of implementing a policy where the schools they are intended for become sites of struggle resulting in some policy prescriptions not being followed

(Bayeni & Bhengu, 2018; Ogza, 2001). Principals are positioned in precarious situations as they must heed multiple accountabilities with stakeholders in their intermediary role between their schools and the DBE (Bayeni & Bhengu, 2018). In mediating these tensions, unintentionally, they become complicit to some of their constituency.

In this study, the prejudice of place and awareness influences the principals' policy implementation. Murphey et al. (2018) state that when policies conceal or do not consider the prevalent inequities, they produce prejudiced contexts. These scholars assert that guidelines and decision-making procedures that "seem neutral on their face but disadvantage some groups relative to others" create prejudice (Murphey et al., 2018, p. 69). The principals in this study trouble the one-size-fits-all approach. As mentioned by the principals, implementing some policies is highly limited by the deprived context. Murphey et al. (2018) posit that, because of their setup and contextual layers of places, contexts can create a prejudice on their own even when the most well-meaning egalitarian people inhibit them.

Overall, this theme illustrates the contested terrain around the policy and the intersections of policy-related challenges and leadership. The principals had to implement policies working with different stakeholders like the SGB. The complexities and the consequences of some of the ways policy was implemented had various implications, both intended and unintended. The last section concludes this chapter.

7.9 Chapter Conclusion

This chapter focussed on understanding why novice principals adopt specific approaches to leadership. The findings indicate that a plethora of factors shape the principals' leadership. These relate to the self and the contexts of being a novice and deprivation. Seven themes emerged and were discussed in this chapter. Past experiences emerged as significant socialising experiences, which the principals now draw from to make meanings of themselves as leaders and shape the way they lead. Understanding the impact of school climate, influenced by the school culture and relations among people, also emerged as a driver for shaping their practices. In supporting the creation of positive school culture and building connections, the principals created spaces for honest conversation, making their offices the sites where such dialogue could occur. As novices with limited opportunities for support and needing to develop professionally, the principals took it upon themselves to learn their jobs through informal networks so they could thrive and effectively lead their schools.

The principals led with an awareness of not just themselves but of factors inherent in their schools that disrupted quality teaching and learning. The theme “Rocked by the rogue waves” discussed the aspects that resulted in the loss of instructional time, making it necessary for principals to mitigate this loss, as mentioned in Chapter six. Further awareness is demonstrated by the principals’ sensitivity to the context of deprivation. The theme “Contexts are prejudiced” discusses why the principals enacted leadership in the ways they do, focussing on the deprived context and why considerations had to be made concerning contextual dynamics. Lastly, the chapter discussed policy politics and why principals implemented policy as active policy enactors. Through these seven themes, the question,” *why do novice principals leading schools in the context of deprivation enact leadership in this way?*” has been answered. The next chapter provides the concluding chapter of this thesis through the synopsis, the discussion of findings, reflections, and conclusions holistically drawn from the study.

CHAPTER EIGHT

LEARNING FROM THE NOVICE PRINCIPALS' TALES: IDENTITIES AND LEADERSHIP AND ITS INTERSECTION WITH THE CONTEXT

8.1 Introduction

This thesis set out on a maiden voyage to unknown terrain. This was the maiden voyage of novice principals, on their first assignment, tasked with leading schools located in deprived contexts. In this section, I first refresh the reader on other chapters of this thesis. I then detail the discussions of the current chapter. Taking a glimpse back, Chapter one presented an overview of the thesis. This was done by providing the background of the study, the statement of the problem, and the research puzzles setting the parameters and boundaries of this inquiry. In the same chapter, I provided a three-fold rationale outlining my personal and professional inclinations for this study and theoretical justification. The chapter also clarified the key concepts and provided the coordinates, a summary of this thesis's chapters which also explained the headings of the thesis.

Chapter two provided a literature review, drawing learnings from previous explorers who have conducted research locally and globally. I explored literature on the context of multiple deprivations. In this exploration, I discussed the historical circumstances influencing this context. I extended the discussion by examining multiple deprivations as a theoretical framing tool through the domains. In discussing the domains, I explained each one, highlighted how it manifested in KwaZulu-Natal, and went further to show the implications it has on livelihoods. I then took a closer look at the combined effects of domains on schools, after which I looked into the scarce literature on leadership for schools in deprived contexts. The discussion then turned to identity discourse, where I highlighted the significance of identity in leadership development, the factors influencing leader identity development, and the transitional journey of making and becoming a principal. Lastly, this chapter discussed the experiences of novice principals. These experiences were categorised as on-job realities relating to self, people, place, and systems and discussed under these groupings

Chapter three discussed the theoretical framework of this study. As shown in this chapter, the framework undergirding this study comprises of sense-making, adaptive, and context-responsive theories. Individually, I discussed each of the theories and illustrated their appropriateness as a framework for this study. As noted in the first chapter, the theoretical

application of using the framework to make meaning of the findings is reserved for the current chapter.

Chapter four detailed the research processes and procedures I adopted to answer the research puzzles and aided this study in uncovering the experiences of novice principals leading schools located in the context of deprivation. I first discussed the interpretive paradigm using its ontological, epistemological, and methodological underpinnings to justify its relevance for this inquiry. Following this, I discussed the qualitative research approach which was followed by the discussion of narrative inquiry, the methodology couching this study. This was followed by a discussion on the selection of participants, in which I detail the processes I used to identify and select the participating novice principals. I profile the selected participants and their processes respective schools in the same section. The following section outlined the and procedures used to generate data. I first explained the life history interviews as the data generation method. I then moved to the practicalisation of how I approached data generation activity through this method. I did this by detailing how I used triggers to solicit remembering so I could generate rich data. I also illustrated the process followed in the different phases of conducting the interviews. The following section covered the data analysis plan. In this discussion, I explicitly explained the dual analysis process of narrative analysis and analysis of narratives detailing how I engaged with each of these levels of analysis. The last section of the chapter discussed issues of trustworthiness. I explained the criterion used: apparency, verisimilitude, fidelity, and transferability. For each criterion, I demonstrated how I ensured that it was fulfilled in this study.

The following three chapters focused on presenting the findings of the study. In Chapter five, I presented the restoried narratives created from the narrative analysis. These stories produced the canvas of experience detailing the storied lives of novice principals to understand who they are (identities) before and during their principalship. From these stories, I extrapolated the emergent identities of the principals, answering the question, “*Who are novice principals leading schools in the context of deprivation?*” The findings indicate that novice principals have multiple identities cultivated from various experiences throughout their life stages.

I then moved on to Chapters six and seven. The findings of these chapters were drawn from the analysis of narratives and presented thematically in the respective chapters. Chapter six responded to research puzzle two, answering the question, “*How do novice principals leading schools in the context of deprivation enact leadership?*” The findings are presented through

seven themes depicting the leadership practices of novice principals. Emerging from these themes is that the novice principals in this study use multiple leadership practices, as will be further discussed in the upcoming section of this chapter.

Through the seven themes presented in Chapter seven, I responded to research puzzle three, answering the question, “*Why do novice principals leading schools in the context of deprivation enact leadership in the way they do?*” In responding to this question, this chapter unveiled why novice principals adopt specific approaches to leadership and lead in the ways they do. The findings indicate that a plethora of factors shape their leadership. These relate to the self and the contexts of being a novice and deprivation.

In this final chapter, I present the lessons that can be drawn from who the principals are (identity), their leadership, and its intersection with the two contexts, the context of being a novice principal and that of leading schools in the context of deprivation. In fulfilling the aim of this chapter, as done above, I took the reader back to what has been done from the first to the seventh chapter to ensure that the lessons I share around identity and leadership and its intersection with the two contexts are understood in connection with all other chapters. I will then provide the theoretical reflections of the dissertation, using the framework to make sense of and meaning of the findings. Methodological and theoretical reflections will follow this. The study’s limitations are also covered in these two sections, which are presented in a scholarly personal narrative style. Lastly, I provide the contributions, followed by the study’s implications. Lastly, I dock the vessel and end this maiden voyage.

8.2 Learning from the Captains’ Tales

This section discusses the study findings presented in Chapters five to seven. In this section, I provide the learnings and theorise about the findings of this study. These are presented through two themes, answering research puzzles one to three. The themes are “Who are novice principals? Captain’s identities,” answering the first research puzzle. The second theme is “Making sense of the novice principals’ leadership,” answering research puzzles two and three and showing how leaders lead and what influences their leadership.

8.2.1 Who are Novice Principals? Captains Identities

In Chapter five, through the principals’ stories, I responded to research puzzle one. I answered the question, “*Who are novice principals leading schools in the context of deprivation?*” From these stories, I found that socialisation toward principalship began before their tenure, starting

as early as childhood. For example, Mholi's experiences of neglect in his early childhood made him introverted, spending time in isolation. From an early age, he developed independence and critical thinking, which older people saw as wisdom not consistent with his age. From these experiences, Mholi began to see himself as a natural-born leader. A school trip changed Maqhinga's outlook and made him a decisive individual and leader. Since making this early life decision, Maqhinga has always been able to make tough decisions and follow them through independently. These examples evidence the claim stated above. They corroborate previous findings (Hammond et al., 2017; Moorosi & Grant, 2018; Ribbins, 2008), which suggest that leadership socialisation occurs informally and formally through various settings commencing from early childhood through the different life stages.

Emerging from the stories and the emergent identities illustrated in Chapter five, novice principals have multiple identities construed along the personal or individual level, relational, and collective domains (Clapp-Smith et al., 2019; Kwok et al., 2018; Moorosi & Grant, 2018). Some shared identities are being a father and mother, being servant leaders, and being a change agent. The multiple emergent identities tabled in chapter five are attached to and emerged from my analysis of the novice principals' life experiences. This reinforces the notion that identities are connected to life experiences (Hallinger, 2018).

In coming up with the emergent identities tabled in Chapter five, I had to look at the leadership practices of the principals to ascertain whether I could identify the use of the emergent identity in the novice principals' leadership repertoire. One such identity was being a context-responsive leader, cultivated and enacted differently by each principal. Maqhinga demonstrated being a context-responsive leader focusing on the root causes of ill-discipline and finding ways to instill discipline in learners. Regarding learners' behaviours, Ntozinhle shared that learners run up to her and hug her. She has accepted that she comes to school clean and leaves messy. Her analysis of the learners' behaviours is not that they are ill-disciplined. Understanding the environments, they live in where in most cases, parents are absent, she sees their behaviors as a yearning for love and affection. Ubuntu enacts being a context-responsive leader in his policy enactment, where he contextualises the admission policy by admitting beyond its prescriptions to fit the needs of the learner population better. His school is called the "scrap yard" school. It attracts learners who have been expelled and those seeking a second chance after dropping out. Some come without documents and reports, but they are admitted against the prescriptions of the admissions policy. These examples support previous research, suggesting that principals draw from their identities as they lead and that identities significantly shape leadership

(Moorosi & Grant, 2018; Miscenko & Day, 2016; Lord & Hall, 2005). Additionally, as stated by Miscenko and Day (2016), these examples show a dynamic reciprocal relationship between identity and work contexts.

This section reinforces the position that identity is significant in leadership discourse and that the socialisation of leaders begins before their tenure. Lastly, it supports previous literature²⁹, which asserts that novice leaders use their identities to inform their beliefs, feelings, attitudes, and goals. As a result, identities shape and guide choices; and influence behaviours and actions. Through the enactment of identity-driven behaviors, novice principals shape their schools and, in turn, are shaped by the contexts in which they lead. The following section theorises on research puzzles one and two.

8.2.2 Making Sense of the Novice Principals' Leadership

The findings of the study indicate that principals practice leadership by utilising various leadership typologies. Through closer analysis, the study identified that leadership for learning, ubuntu leadership, and servant leadership were the dominant typologies. The study also found that the principals engaged in informal conversations in informal spaces and relied on their past experiences in shaping their leadership practices. The context was also found to play a significant role in shaping their leadership practices. This section will further discuss the overall impression of the leadership of the participating novice principals.

8.2.2.1 Leadership for Learning

According to Hallinger (2011), leadership for learning is a typology that describes practices and approaches used by principals to provide quality teaching and learning to achieve school outcomes. Unlike instructional leadership, which emphasises the principal role of discharging responsibilities for the academic core, leadership for learning incorporates a broader range of leadership sources and additional foci for action (Bower & Boyce, 2018; Hallinger, 2011). Firstly, this typology emphasises the contextual embeddedness of leadership enactment, highlighting the societal culture, institutional system, school organisation, and staff and community characteristics as a bounded system (Hallinger, 2011). Hallinger (2011) posits that effective leaders lead with an awareness of this bounded system, and thus they are shaped by and respond to the constraints and opportunities produced within this system.

²⁹ (Clapp-Smith et al., 2019; Day et al., 2005 Kwok et al., 2018; Lord & Hall, 2005; Moorosi & Grant, 2018; Miscenko et al., 2017; Scribner & Crow, 2012)

In this study, the novice principals reported contextualising policies and operating beyond the prescripts of policy protocols to respond to the bounded system. They emphasized securing the well-being of their learners and making their schools safe havens. This approach was solicited because of their awareness of the challenging socioeconomic backgrounds of their learners, who came from homes with single parents, child-headed homes, and homes led by grandparents or guardians. Thus, they shaped their practices to accommodate the context in which they lead. Further demonstrating contextual awareness, one principal shared that she understood she could not ask learners to bake goods to raise funds through a cake sale. This would not work in her school as learners come from homes where financial resources are strained. Another principal reported that he ensured that he supported pregnant learners. This was because he understood that teenage pregnancy was a societal problem, and he, too, had been born to a teenager. These examples illustrate how the principals demonstrated an awareness of the bounded system and aligned their practices to respond to the constraints and opportunities inherent in this system.

Another element of this typology is that leadership is moderated and influenced by personal inclinations, including values, beliefs, knowledge, and leaders' experience (Hallinger, 2011). In this study, the principals shared that their values influenced their behaviors. These values are attached to personal level identities (Brewer & Gardner, 1996; Clapp-Smith et al., 2019). They included respect, love, kindness, and integrity, to mention a few. They also leaned on Christian beliefs as a Compass to guide their behaviours. The principals' knowledge and experience also significantly shaped their leadership. Their positionality as novice principals meant that they had to rely on past experiences as a knowledge base to guide their actions. Understanding their positionality, three principals sought professional development through others. Two relied on each other, organically forming a critical friendship, while one principal sought a mentor to aid her learning. The principals also invited others to lead, creating a fertile ground for fostering collaboration. They did this because they understood that, as novice principals, they did not have the circumference of skills needed to turn their schools around. They also knew they needed the buy-in of all stakeholders to facilitate and sustain school improvement efforts. Additionally, they understood that working with others would provide them with learning opportunities and legitimise their decisions, thus validating their leadership.

While school leaders are influenced by their personal inclinations and the bounded system, they indirectly impact student outcomes through school-level processes, which include the

vision and goals, academic structures and processes, and people capacity (Hallinger, 2011). This is reciprocal, and these school-level processes influence leaders (Hallinger, 2011). According to Hallinger (2011), vision pertains to the broad direction schools see on the horizon. On the other hand, goals are the incremental milestones put in place to reach the envisioned horizon (Hallinger, 2011). Together the vision and goals inspire people to selflessly commit themselves to achieve the collective goals (Hallinger, 2011). Scholars (Hallinger & Heck, 2002; Leithwood, 2004) suggest that the motivational power of vision is also prominent in transformational leadership; hence this typology embraces some of its tenets. Transformational leadership applies to leadership for learning specifically on the processes of influence leaders draw from to affect their followers in ways that motivate, empower, and inspire them to work beyond the call of duty to achieve organizational goals (Aga et al., 2016; Fischer 2017; Hallinger, 2011).

According to Bass and Riggio (2006; 2010), transformational leaders lead by example, behaving in ways that make them exemplars of good practices and serving as role models to those they lead. They communicate a clear vision and mobilise stakeholders through motivation and inspiration toward the ownership and pursuit of collective goals (Bass & Riggio, 2010). They are “intellectually stimulating” (p.77), harnessing and nurturing the potential of each individual (Bass & Riggio, 2010). Transformational leaders stimulate followers to achieve extraordinary outcomes by providing development opportunities through “coaching, mentoring, and provision of support” (Bass & Riggio, 2010, p. 78), expanding the followers' use of their abilities.

In this study, the principals reported modelling positive behaviours and adhering to professional conduct. They stated that they were respectful and honest about their intentions. They shared that they walked the talk, leading from the front and going the extra mile to inspire teachers and learners alike. The novice principals expressed that they leaned on a participative, people-oriented approach where they collectively worked with others to create a sustainable vision and ambitious goals, like aiming for a 100% pass rate in subjects where it has been normalised that this is not ideal. Additionally, the principals reported providing opportunities such as professional learning communities to give teachers agency and support to develop professionally and get the capital to achieve collective aspirations.

Further demonstrating transformational leadership, the principals “reassure their followers that obstacles will be overcome” (Bass & Riggio, 2010, p. 78). In this study, the principals did not

avoid troubling and naming issues that create obstacles. They troubled the one-size fits all approach to policy, the lack of support, and the insufficient funding model. They worked against the tide and drew on records of milestones like improving enrolment numbers and taking performance to momentous levels to reassure and give their followers hope to overcome. The practices described above align with transformational leadership, forming part of learning leadership (Hallinger, 2011).

Regarding academic structures and enhancing people's capacity, instructional leadership best captures these dimensions (Hallinger, 2011). This reciprocal influence on these dimensions is about managing and strengthening the instructional core and creating a conducive, positive environment for teaching and learning (Hallinger & Murphey, 1985; Hallinger, 2003;2011; Robinson et al., 1998). Managing and strengthening the instructional core entails supervising, evaluating, and monitoring teaching, learning, and curriculum delivery (Hallinger & Murphey, 1985; Hallinger, 2003;2011). Creating and promoting a conducive, positive environment for teaching and learning include multiple leadership activities such as protecting instructional time, providing professional development opportunities, maintaining high visibility, and providing incentives for teachers and learners (Hallinger & Murphey 1985; Hallinger 2003).

The principals reported strengthening the instruction core through indirect means. They used data-driven decision-making to aid their decision-making processes. These included decisions about duty load allocation and identifying poor and top-performing students and teachers so they could direct appropriate support. They distributed leadership to DHs to support teachers and monitor curriculum delivery and learners' progress. They developed teachers through professional learning communities. They also created a conducive environment by building relations and strengthening and reshaping the school culture planning and communications systems to minimise loss of instructional time.

8.2.2.2 *The Leader as a Servant*

In this study, we learn that the principals saw themselves as servants. According to Greenleaf (2002; 2008), the servant leader is naturalistically servant first. The enactment of leadership characterises this servant-first approach. A servant leader puts people first, focusing on creating mutually nourishing relationships (Greenleaf, 2002). They place the needs of those they serve first by understanding them (Greenleaf, 2002). Understanding is achieved through having a listening ear, engaging with others first, and only then responding to problems (Greenleaf,

2002; Spears, 2010). It is sought not as an end but as a way to create opportunities and fulfill these needs (Greenleaf, 2002). Servant leaders commit themselves to human growth (Spears, 2010).

In this study, demonstrating this, the novice principals opened up space for participation by creating spaces for safe dialogue for all stakeholders to communicate their needs. They listened to others to gain an understanding of diverse issues. Through these understandings, they collectively worked with stakeholders to set realistic goals and create conducive environments for realising such endeavours. They collaborated with others, took a follower role when needed, and turned failures or shortcomings into opportunities to learn and improve. They also provided support mechanisms such as professional development opportunities for staff to sharpen their expertise, enabling them to provide meaningful teaching and learning experiences. Greenleaf (2010) states that "servant leaders are functionally superior because they are closer to the ground – they hear things, see things, and know things"(p. 93), as demonstrated in this study.

Putting people first, they also led in ways to restore the humanness of those under their care, which is a priority, especially in contexts where multiple factors dehumanise those who work and live in them. They foregrounded their leadership repertoire on compassion, healing, and stewardship (Spears, 2010). Greenleaf (2002) states that servant leaders ask:

"Do those served grow as persons? Do they, while being served, become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, more likely themselves to become servants? And, what is the effect on the least privileged in society; will they benefit, or, at least, not be further deprived?" (p. 5)

The principals sought to make their schools safe and treated teachers and learners with respect and dignity. For learners, in particular, they intervened in any arising issues, leading with care and giving love through the expression of diverse identities, such as being a father, a mother, or a change agent, to mention a few.

A leader as a servant also leads through foresight, envisioning what is not yet seen and what may even seem overly ambitious and unachievable, given the prevailing conditions under which it is proposed (Greenleaf, 2002; Spears, 2010). Greenleaf (2002) describes this foresight as an act of faith (Greenleaf, 2002). While envisioning these futures, they maintain composure, understanding they must build one brick and action at a time (Greenleaf, 2002).

In this study, the principals demonstrated this by setting ambitious goals, such as wanting to be top performers in their districts and striving for 100% pass rates in subjects that had previously

not been able to achieve such performance in their schools. They also had the vision of their schools being utopias where all learners would receive a fit-for-purpose education, propelling them to unleash their full potential. However, they exercised patience by setting realistic short, medium, and long-term goals and putting mechanisms that would scaffold towards achieving them.

Greenleaf (2002) asserts that the forward-thinking attitude of servant leaders comes at a risk. Servant leaders accept the risks and dangers of taking an unknown path and the criticism that comes with their idealistic views (Greenleaf, 2002). The novice principals in this study are aware of these risks. “Awareness is not a giver of solace – it is just the opposite. It is a disturber and an awakener” (Greenleaf, 2002, p. 15). The novice principals in this study understand the risks of working with allies and the criticism that comes from that; they know the danger of disrupting the status quo by not normalising the abnormal, being active policy enactors, and interpreting policies and contextualising them to lead their schools. They know the risk of potential rejection in finding no one to support their vision or having those they trust throw them under the bus. They are aware of the uncertainty but say, “I will go; follow me” (Greenleaf, 2002, p. 7). In this study, the novice principals led from the helm, first pushing the boundaries and showing commitment to their vision. Their actions and leap of faith led others to a collective mindset needed to undertake the messy work of the unknown.

Lastly, Spears (1998) asserts that servant leaders intuitively understand past lessons. In this study, the principals harnessed their past experiences, using these reflexively and practically to guide their leadership. Early childhood experiences of taking responsibility for siblings and making clear decisions now influenced how they led. Their educational experiences of having teachers who were change agents and of receiving adequate preparation for the world of work at college were the reserves that the principals now used as their fuel. Receiving informal mentorship by working in close proximity with school leaders and taking the initiative as post-level one teachers, giving them exposure to school leadership tasks, also influenced their leadership.

8.2.2.3 *Umuntu Ngumuntu Ngabantu*

“*Umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*” is a Nguni phrase used to describe and capture the essence of what Ubuntu means. The term means “a person is a person because of or through others” (Ncube, 2010). Central tenets of Ubuntu include humanness, compassion, love, a pervasive spirit of caring and community, reciprocity, harmony, dignity, respect, and responsiveness that

individuals and groups display for one another (Malunga, 2009; Ncube, 2010; Nzimakwe, 2014). It emphasises collectivism and relationships, interconnectedness and dependency, and relationship building, which is the cornerstone of building trust and fostering collaboration (Ncube, 2010; Nzimakwe, 2014). Ubuntu requires that leaders ‘water’ people. They water them by providing opportunities for them to develop their capacity so they can unleash their human potential. The development of one is seen as a development of all. Thus, the development of the human being comes first and should be prioritised before all other considerations because the organisation’s capacity can be cultivated by obtaining the best out of everyone (Nzimakwe, 2014).

In this study, the principals favoured a people-first approach by opening spaces for participation and working with others through mutual symbiotic relationships. They led through people, building alliances to gain the capital needed to reach their full potential so all could contribute to realising the community goals. In schools where cultures were toxic and where there was conflict, they focused on reshaping these factors so a sense of community could be restored and sustained. The principals treated all stakeholders with respect and dignity, central tenets of Ubuntu. Their leadership repertoire was care, love, compassion, and hope. Amongst other ways, they enacted this by being many things to their learners and staff according to their needs. They placed professional development at the forefront by initiating professional learning communities and other peer learning initiatives. The principals gave those with talents opportunities to lead and supported them as they led different activities.

Other elements of Ubuntu include modelling ethical and professional behaviours for others, with leaders also embracing transparency, participation, and democracy in decision-making processes (Ncube, 2010). Leaders guided by Ubuntu do not conceal truths but make realities bare so there can be collective ownership of opportunities, responsibilities, and challenges (Malunga, 2009). There is an agenda to develop not just the self but to collectively see the shared vision impact change and transform the lives of all those who participate in the community (Ncube, 2010; Nzimakwe, 2014).

The novice principals were transparent about their intentions and invited others to participate in decision-making. They saw themselves as change agents, seeing their leadership role as positioning them to change and transform the livelihoods of those they led and those who were part of the school communities. They did not normalise the abnormal. However, they also did not dwell on the present. They knew that “criticism has its place, but as a total preoccupation,

it is sterile” (Greenleaf, 2002). They then forged to make their schools safe havens, places where quality teaching and learning could be realised and, in turn, the site where learners’ dignity and sense of self-worth could be restored. The principals led this way because of their past experiences, having seen the value of education in their lives. Having had humble beginnings and being raised in similar communities, the novice principals could resonate with the experiences of the learners and the community they served. Thus, they valued all human beings irrespective of background (Ncube, 2010; Nzimakwe, 2014).

8.2.2.4 Using Informal Conversations in Liminal Spaces

The principals used informal conversations in liminal spaces. Informal conversations are trustful and private (Roxå & Mårtensson, 2009). They are intellectually stimulating, providing opportunities for professional development and learning (Haigh, 2005; Roxå & Mårtensson, 2009; Thomson, 2020). They occur serendipitously in communal and in-between spaces like corridors, car parks, or staff rooms (Thomson, 2020). These spaces become liminal and are conducive because they are not characterised by power relations assigned to roles and hierarchies in the organisation (Thomson, 2020). Thus, they have an open agenda, and are permissive without hierarchical boundaries making this risky as they can be used to discuss high-stake, complex issues which others would not be able to raise or discuss in formal settings (Haigh, 2005; Roxå & Mårtensson, 2009; Thomson, 2020).

In this study, the principals adopted an open-door policymaking their offices a liminal space for informal conversations. While this space may be an official space, the principals reshaped it by making it accessible to all, neutralizing it as a space where only "official" business can happen. The principals were discrete with the privileged information they received through the conversations and used it tactfully when responding to some of the issues raised. For instance, after finding out that duty load allocation was based on malicious practices, one principal intervened using the 4Ds approach. They also used informal conversations as a relationship-building medium to resolve conflict, build relationships and get like-minded individuals who would walk with them as they attempted to reshape and strengthen the school culture and the instructional core. The novice principals also engaged in informal conversations with their critical friends and a mentor. These were to aid their professional development, get social and emotional support, and engage in critical reflection and collective sense-making on practice issues (Thomson, 2020).

8.2.2.5 *Using Past Experiences as the Compass of Leadership*

The novice principals used their past experiences as a resource or compass to guide their leadership. Our life experiences serve as a resource base through which we filter through and interpret information, problems, opportunities, and situations (Hallinger, 2018). Our life experiences are also the canvas where our identities are shaped and reshaped. Identities are significant because they inform our beliefs, feelings, attitudes, and goals; they shape and guide our choices and influence our behaviours and actions³⁰.

Whether consciously or subconsciously, the principals in this study engage in identity work as they navigate life and leadership. For example, learning to deal with tensions and diffuse tense situations while he was House Com, Mholi cultivated the identity of being a mediator, as shown in his emergent identities. It is unsurprising that upon arrival at his school, he focused on building broken relationships, mediating the tensions caused by contestations around management posts. Having been the subject of scrutiny at university because of her vocation, Ntozinhle learned to be assertive. This assertiveness is prominent in her leadership when she makes the call that the two DHs in the acting position should no longer occupy the office, as this causes tensions to flare. Various scholars (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002; Carroll & Levy, 2010; Holmer-Nadeson, 1996) suggest that this takes place in a context called space of action. Carroll and Levy (2010) describe space of action as a dynamic space where people make conscious decisions to construct their identities in ways they see as befitting. Other scholars (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002; Holmer-Nadeson, 1996) explain the space of action as a space offering individuals the opportunities to identify, counter-identify, and dis-identify with any imposed identities and decide what to shed, what to retain and who to be. Identity work happens in a messy space of action filled with contradictions, disruptions, confusion, and contextual instability (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002). Through their agency, reflexivity, and fluidity, individuals are then propelled to “create a landscape of enabling constraints” and “an intelligible formulation” out of chaos (Carroll & Levy, 2010; Shotter, 1993, p. 157).

Chapter seven dealt with why principals enact leadership the way they do. The study found that past experiences serve as the space for socialisation about leadership. Research on socialisation suggests that people are likely to grow up and emulate and behave as they were socialised (Hallinger, 2018; Moorosi & Grant, 2018; Miscenko & Day, 2016). In this study, multiple

³⁰ (Day et al., 2005; Clapp-Smith et al., 2019; Kwok et al., 2018; Moorosi & Grant, 2018; Miscenko et al., 2017; Scribner & Crow, 2012)

childhood, educational and professional experiences were socialising experiences for novice principals. For the most part, the childhood experiences were traumatic; however, at a later stage, when the novice principals assumed leadership, they channelled these traumatic experiences through identity work into sources of capital that they could use to lead. What we see in the leadership of these principals is that negative socialisation may actually be key in driving leaders to think and try to be different compared to those they learned from.

In this regard, hooks (1994, p. 5) states the following:

“Accepting the teaching profession as my destiny, I was tormented by the classroom reality I had known both as an undergraduate and graduate student. The vast majority of our professors lacked basic communication skills, were not self-actualised, and often used the classroom to enact rituals of control about domination and unjust exercise of power. In these settings, I learned a lot about the kind of teacher I did not want to become. “

Like hooks (1994), the novice principals in this study engaged in identity work. For example, having been victimised in his schooling by a teacher, one of the principals vowed he would never perpetrate such behaviours. This indicates the continual identity work in the space of action where one uses reflexivity to decide who they want to be and who they do not want to be.

This identity work is also occurring in a messy space of action. The principals are expected to be drivers of change, to serve the interests of all, and to be multiple things to multiple people. While these are the expectations, they are still in the transitioning phase, which is precarious as this is a stage of survival (Oplatka, 2012). Thus, we see that the identity work happens out of chaos as they navigate expectations while simultaneously finding who best to be. The findings affirm this previous research³¹ which suggests a confluence between identity and leadership in that identities influence work-related behaviours and significantly shape leadership practices.

8.2.2.6 Leadership and the Context: Does the Context Matter?

Contexts influence school leadership (Bossert et al., 1982; Braun et al., 2011; Clarke & O'Donoghue, 2016; Hallinger, 2018; Leithwood et al., 2020). The deprived context is the terrain in which leadership is enacted in this study. As will be shown below, there are other contexts. Drawing from Braun et al. (2011) and Hallinger (2018), contexts can be grouped into

³¹ (Hallinger, 2018; Miscenko & Day, 2016; Lord & Hall, 2005; Scribner & Crow, 2012)

situated or community, economic or material, institutional, school improvement, and professional contexts. According to Hallinger (2018), in confluence with each other, these contexts define the principals' leadership challenge making it necessary for them to find ways to understand the context features and the culture of the schools. Clarke and Wildy (2013) state that these insights give principals the capital to determine the schools' interests and priorities (Clarke & Wildy, 2013). In this study, the contexts discussed below shaped the leadership of novice principals, and in turn, the novice principals shaped these contexts in various ways. In other words, we learn here that context shapes leadership but also leadership shapes the context.

The situated context or community context describes aspects of the school related to its geographic location, the schools' history, the learner population, the socioeconomic status of parents, and parent and community involvement in the school (Braun et al., 2011; Hallinger, 2018). In this study, the geographic location is the deprived context. The other factors, learner population, parent and community involvement, and socioeconomic status, are influenced by the context of deprivation. Firstly, having grown up under similar economic hardships, the principals resonated with the learners' experiences and were empathetic, shaping their leadership accordingly. In deprived contexts, multiple social inequities contribute to dehumanisation (Cho et al., 2022). Cautious of these, the novice principal leadership repertoire aimed to be a source of re/humanisation. According to Cho et al. (2022) re/humanisation is a conscious commitment to the humanising process, emphasising the need to engage the heart, body, and mind connections in teaching and, by extension, leadership.

The principals engaged in this re/humanising approach through empathy. This empathy was demonstrated through caring for learners, giving them love and affirmation, and intervening on multiple issues to ensure our learners' well-being, like providing them with financial support to facilitate their CAO applications. To provide such care, the principals drew on numerous identities, such as being a father, a mother, and a nurse, to mention a few. The principals extended their empathy to the parents by leading with the context in mind and not making requests and demands that the parents could not meet. Demonstrating this, one principal chose not to call parents for trivial issues as she knew the learners lived with elderly grandparents who would struggle to attend these meetings.

Additionally, the principals took stock of the history of their schools, further illuminating the influence of the situated context. Those who were external appointments first observed the school culture to understand the dynamics. After observation, they sought creative ways to

reshape the culture by building relationships for peacebuilding. The principals also changed the culture by instituting new practices not used by previous leadership. These included having an open-door policy and giving people the space to participate in decision-making.

An additional layer of the community context is the impact of community conflict (Hallinger, 2018). Community protests in some of the areas where the schools are located resulted in the loss of instructional time. This being externally located, the principals were constrained in what they could do. However, the loss of instructional time was not just influenced by external issues. Having observed the implications of the loss of instructional time, they made sure to protect it by strengthening communication systems and planning so that the time was effectively used when they were in school.

The economic or material context refers to a wide range of things, including staffing, class size, per-pupil expenditures, budget, buildings, and other infrastructure (Braun et al., 2011; Hallinger, 2018). Like those which have been previously discussed, this context shapes leadership practices in various ways. In this study, staffing issues had implications for class sizes resulting in overcrowding. This issue was further exacerbated by insufficient funding, constraining principals from embarking on infrastructure projects to maintain, refurbish, and extend classes. Additionally, the funding allocation was inadequate and further strained by incorrect enrolment numbers caused by deviation from the admission policy and inconsistent capturing of enrolment numbers in some cases. Financial constraints also demanded that the principals contextualise their implementation of policy. While policy dictated the provision of funds for travel to workshops and other day-to-day activities like going to the district, the novice principals could not make these provisions for themselves and their staff, positively deviating from policy prescriptions.

The institutional context describes the educational system schools operate within the sector (Hallinger, 2018). The district norms, the frameworks and vision, and the support structures available to principals created a work context that shaped their leadership (Hallinger, 2018). In this study, observing the status quo of limited professional development and support from the district, the principals found critical friends (Maqhinga and Ubuntu) and a mentor (Ntozinhle) to aid their learning and provide support. Additionally, it emerged that the enactment of policy had different outcomes, shining light on how the norms within the district lead to different results. All the principals implemented the admission policy based on contextually driven factors, such as taking in learners without reports or the required certification. This, however,

produced different outcomes. For others, admitting outside the prescriptions of the policy meant that the additional learners were not added to the school enrolment, which had consequences for resource allocation. Others used the same approach to maintain the human resource allocation in terms of the PPN. According to Braun et al. (2011), enacting policy can produce circumstances where there are no significant changes, or it can have radical and unintended outcomes. The differentiation in results emerging from this study provides evidence that, in context, policy enactment is a multifaceted and iterative process (Braun et al., 2011).

The school improvement context refers to the school improvement trajectory (Hallinger, 2018). Different typologies have been used to describe schools at different levels in the school improvement trajectory. Drawing from Stoll and Fink (1996), schools at varying levels of effectiveness and improvement can be described as cruising, struggling, or sinking schools. In this study, two schools were cruising (Maqhinga and Ubuntu) while one was sinking (Ntozinhle). In Mholi's school, the school's improvement trajectory was unclear. However, like in Ntozinhle's school, the toxic culture negatively influenced school effectiveness. The school improvement context presented a challenge for all the principals as they had to turn the tide to either reshape or strengthen the school culture, turn the tide concerning the sinking school, or arrest the cruising schools from sinking.

The principals responded to the school improvement context in various ways. They used a holistic approach to school improvement, focusing on relationship building to understand their schools' present trajectory and to find assets within the school stakeholders who would assist in school improvement initiatives. This was done by creating a conducive environment built on collegial relationships, transparency, honesty, and trust.

The principals then took a strong focus on improving teaching and learning. Through indirect means, they provided capacitation through professional development initiatives. They found ways to mitigate the loss of instructional time by improving systems and changing norms that negatively impacted time on task. The principals used 4Ds to guide decision-making and legitimise the decisions taken. 4Ds was also used to assess and monitor learner progress, learners at risk, and teachers' command in the subjects, seen through the pass rate. These assessments were not for punitive measures but to provide support and necessary interventions. The focus on the instructional core was also through distributing leadership to DHs to support teachers and monitor curriculum delivery.

Driving the actions and practices was the underlying belief that school improvement would require the collective capital of all stakeholders and commitment to the vision. Additionally, as novice principals, all of them could only stamp their presence as leaders by changing the directions of their schools. Spillane and Lee (2014) and Optlatka (2012) state that novice principals are transitioning in their first years of appointment. This transition phase is marked by various dilemmas, such as learning the organisational culture, attaining acceptance, developing confidence, and overcoming the insecurities attached to the unknown (Optlatka, 2012; Spillane & Lee, 2014). Positively altering the school improvement context presents an opportunity for novices to attain acceptance. Lastly, the principals' actions are influenced by their past experiences, where they have witnessed the power of collective capital and the impact of informal learning opportunities on their practice. Consequentially, they lean toward approaches they know and those that have worked for them.

Professional contexts refer to inter-related dynamics such as school policy management and how this influences policy enactments (Hallinger, 2018). In this study, policy management was driven by the other contexts compelling principals to enact policies in various ways. According to Braun et al. (2010), policy enactment is a feature of the policy process, and schools produce their own interpretation of policy within the limitations and possibilities of context(s). Eposito (2000) adds that humans do not simply confront social objects and events but define them in ways consistent with their unique experiences and circumstances. In this study, the novice principals were active policy enactors. They implemented policies in line with what would be feasible in their schools. This included leniency on some issues, being flexible in some cases, and following directives that were outside the prescripts of the policy.

8.2.2.7 Leading as a Novice Principal in a Deprived School Context

This study shows that the leadership practices of the participating novice principals are similar to those of more experienced principals. According to Day and Sammons (2016) and Leithwood et al. (2020), successful principals influence the school culture. They do this by defining the mission and setting clear goals to fulfill the defined mission (Day & Simmon, 2016; Leithwood et al., 2020). In this study, the participating principals reported strengthening and reshaping the school culture by setting clear directives and giving people space and support to ensure that these directives were met. One principal collaboratively created a new mission and vision for the school, while the other articulated his vision through an opening speech, telling his staff that he envisaged the school's name being in the conversation when subject advisors talk about top-performing teachers in a subject.

These scholars (Day & Sammon, 2016; Leithwood et al., 2020) further add that successful principals build relationships with internal and external stakeholders. Building relationships emerged as a finding as one of the practices of the novice principals in this study. They build relationships by being accessible and having an open-door policy, making their offices liminal spaces for conversations. The novice principals also build relationships by being transparent and opening up the space for participation, creating a fertile environment where collaboration and collegiality would thrive.

Additionally, successful school leaders develop the capacity of people (Day & Sammon, 2016; Leithwood et al., 2020). The participating novice principals reported that they encourage peer learning by creating professional learning communities for their teachers. They also distributed leadership to DHs, emphasising they extended a supportive role for teachers with challenges and difficulties in their allocated subjects.

Lastly, Day and Sammons (2016) and Leithwood et al. (2020) state that successful school leaders enhance teaching and learning and improve the instructional programme. The principals of this study did this in various ways. Firstly, they looked at education holistically and ensured that the lessons mediated through the hidden curriculum were affirming. They did this by extending love to their learners, dismantling negative stereotypes, and intervening in various ways to secure the well-being of their learners.

Secondly, they targeted the instructional core so their learners would have a meaningful learning experience and achieve positive outcomes. Where possible, the novice principals reshuffled duty loads for more efficient allocations. They emphasized curriculum leadership by DHs, who monitored learners' work and supported teachers. They used 4Ds to detect poor and top-performing learners. As stated above, they created spaces for the professional development of teachers. They also focused on capacitating themselves through their critical friends and a mentor. The novices also strengthened the academic core by minimising the loss of instructional time through improved communication and planning.

8.3 Theoretical Reflections

This section presents the theoretical reflections of this study, guided by the theoretical framework provided in Chapter Three. This study's theoretical framework comprises sense-making, adaptive leadership, and context-responsive leadership theories. In Chapter Three, I presented the theories, concluding with a synthesis of these theories as a framework. In this

chapter, through the stories shared by principals, I glance back at their stories to illuminate some incidents and events that catapulted them into the unknown terrain and highlight the theoretical insights gained through the framework of this study.

8.3.1 The Rogue Waves Revisited

These vignettes illustrate some incidents and situations that created novelty, ambiguity, and confusion, violating the expectations of novice principals upon assumption of their role (Maitlis & Christiansen, 2014). These are some of the conditions that produced technical and adaptive challenges for novice principals. The principals in this study are contextually literate, demonstrating the ability to diagnose situations and context variations and create the most appropriate, rational account of these issues to enable action in circumstances where there is no obvious way to engage so they can thrive (Heifetz, 2010; Maitlis & Christiansen, 2014; Weick et al., 2005). They also demonstrate contextual intelligence and awareness, shaping their practices relative to the context of deprivation (Bredeson et al., 2011; Kutz, 2008). In the section below, I provide theoretical insights to clarify the findings concerning the theories adopted in this study.

Figure 8.1 The Rogue Waves



8.3.2 Sense-Making Theory

Using sense-making theory as the lens, in this study, the novice principals engaged in continuous sense-making for identity work, leadership enactment, and creating rational accounts of what drives their identities and leadership practices. Through the seven properties of sense-making, I demonstrate how and why the novice principals engaged in sense-making in this study.

8.3.2.1 *I Bring Myself to the Table: Identity Construction*

The findings suggest that novice principals use continuous sense-making to shape their identities, enact leadership, and rationalize their practices. The process of identity construction involves drawing on past and present experiences as a resource toolkit to guide their leadership. Being new appointments in their schools, Ntozinhle and Mholi took on the observer identity to learn and understand the culture of their schools. Ubuntu took on the follower identity when needed, allowing others to lead. Maqhinga relied on his teacher identity, setting high expectations for his students, working tirelessly to achieve them, and influencing others to do the same in their subjects. Additionally, among others, the identities of being a mother (Ntozinhle), a father (Mholi and Maqhinga), and a nurturing leader (Mholi) were drawn upon by the principals as they led.

8.3.2.2 *I do not Exist in Isolation: Social*

The novice principals were well aware that their encounters were contextually driven, influenced by the physical spaces but also by the people within those spaces (Mills et al., 2010;

Weick, 1995). They understood that they did not operate in isolation and, thus, embraced the social aspect of sense-making. To navigate their path effectively, the novice principals responded to the social space by first comprehending its complexities and establishing relationships. They actively engaged in conversations and dialogue, creating safe environments for communication, being transparent and approachable, and breaking down hierarchical barriers between their office and those they served. Despite the constraints of the deprived context, the principals took on multiple roles, challenging the status quo and refusing to normalize the abnormal. They became transformative agents, demonstrating their awareness of the importance of the social context and how leaders should shape and be shaped by the social spaces in which they exercise their leadership.

However, despite the benefits of working with others, one principal faced challenges as her approach of collaborating with her team of allies was perceived by some as showing favoritism, potentially leading to negative consequences and resentment. Additionally, when engaging with School Governing Bodies (SGBs) in collaborative decision-making, the novice principals encountered difficulties, as some SGB stakeholders conspired to appoint their preferred service providers, even if they did not offer value-for-money services. Furthermore, the principals had to deal with situations where SGB stakeholders selectively chose which activities they wanted to participate in, leaving the principals to handle the remaining tasks. These examples highlight that while working with others and recognizing the value of people is important, it may also lead to unintended outcomes.

Apart from these challenges, other aspects of their leadership involved analyzing anomalies such as the loss of instructional time, the school cultures, the socioeconomic challenges prevalent in the deprived context, and filtering information to craft appropriate responses to these social dynamics based on their analysis.

8.3.2.3 Looking Back to Move Forward: Retrospective

Retrospective sense-making involves drawing from past experiences to inform present actions. In this study, the novice principals engaged in reflective practices, drawing strength and valuable lessons from their backgrounds and past challenges to shape their leadership approaches. By sifting through their past, they discerned what aspects could be carried forward and applied in their current roles as school leaders.

The principals' early life experiences presented significant hurdles, but they adeptly transformed these challenges into sources of inspiration for their leadership. For instance,

Ntoznhle, who had to drop out of school and support her family by finding employment, learned patience through those difficult times, which she now applied in her leadership role. Maqhinga, who had experienced victimization by a teacher who happened to be his aunt during his school days, used this experience as a benchmark for the kind of teacher he never wanted to become. This shaped him into a transformational leader dedicated to positively impacting the lives of his learners.

Reflecting on their shortcomings was also integral to their growth as leaders. The principals acknowledged their novice positionality and recognized the challenges inherent in the deprived context they operated within. However, they did not dwell on these challenges. Instead, they sought support from critical friends (Maqhinga and Ubuntu) and a mentor (Ntozinhle) to aid their learning and professional development.

Considering their context, the principals approached policy enactment in a context-sensitive manner. They focused on providing a meaningful teaching and learning experience under the turbulent circumstances of the deprived context. By employing retrospective sense-making, novice principals navigated their roles' complexities with solid self-awareness and a commitment to learn and adapt in their leadership journey continuously.

8.3.2.4 Sift Through the Noise: Focused on and by Extracted Cues

The novice principals displayed a realistic approach, recognizing that change is a gradual process and that specific issues required immediate attention. They skillfully navigated through the multitude of challenges and events, discerning which ones to address with priority. Among the key priorities identified by the principals in this study were school culture, quality teaching and learning, professional development, and humanizing leadership.

Collaborating with others, the principals set practical and achievable goals and expectations. This approach allowed them to maintain stability and focus amidst the dynamic and ever-changing experiences they encountered. By strategically selecting their focus areas and working collaboratively with stakeholders, the novice principals effectively managed the complexities of their roles and made meaningful progress toward their leadership objectives.

8.3.2.5 Each Action Taken Creates the Need for Further Action: Enactive of Sensible Environments and Ongoing and Continuous

The sense-making process was continuous and enactive, with each action leading to the need for further action. The principals recognized the importance of building relationships, which proved to be valuable sources of information and support for school improvement initiatives.

Through these relationships, they identified allies and individuals with the necessary skills to contribute to their goals. The principals made strategic decisions using the information obtained, such as adjusting duty load allocation using the 4Ds approach.

They also fostered nurturing environments encouraging collegiality and allowing others to take on leadership roles. When faced with challenges or outcomes that did not meet their expectations, the principals treated these situations as learning opportunities for future endeavours. They remained attentive to the needs of their learners, responding to their yearning for care, love, and affirmation. The principals motivated the learners to excel academically by restoring their self-esteem and providing focused instructional support.

As active policy enactors, the principals contextualized policies to suit the specific needs of their schools. However, they were mindful that such policy enactment could produce varying outcomes, such as stability or instability in the PPN. Recognizing the value of critical friendships, they identified and supported newly appointed principals, continuing the sense-making process and creating further cues for effective leadership.

8.3.2.6 *The “Best” Way Forward: Driven by Plausibility*

Novice principals in this study sought plausible actions. In this study, the principals faced the challenge of balancing their roles as novices, school principals and navigating the deprived context. They had to make appropriate decisions considering each of these facets.

Regarding their novice status, the principals acknowledged it but chose not to dwell on its limitations. They did not lament about the lack of timely induction or unfocused professional development workshops. Instead, they found ways to empower themselves through critical friendships and mentorship. They recognized that certain leadership aspects could be drawn from their past experiences and retrospectively applied these lessons to their present leadership. This approach is plausible, given that limited professional development opportunities are common, and focusing solely on this aspect would not be productive.

As novice principals, they proceeded cautiously, taking the time to understand the school culture and building relationships to foster a commitment to collective goals. As expected by policy, they collaborated with various stakeholders, creating schools where participation was valued, thus increasing the resources needed for school improvement. The principals led by example, displaying value-laden, ethical, and professional behaviors while enhancing teaching, learning, and overall school effectiveness. Since school improvement and effectiveness are key performance areas for principals, their leadership repertoire is aligned appropriately.

Furthermore, the principals were fully aware of the contextual constraints and their impact on their leadership. This awareness stemmed from their socialization, having grown up and attended schools in similar contexts. They could recognize societal cues that differentiated various school contexts and conditions. Rather than becoming overwhelmed by the context, they actively addressed systemic anomalies and identified prejudice within the deprived context. Some principals expressed that not much had changed since their years as learners in such schools. Nevertheless, they led in a context-focused manner, considering what they could and could not do within the context's limitations. They led with care, using multiple identities to secure their learners' well-being, dignity, and self-esteem. Moreover, they exhibited creativity in adapting policies to suit their school's specific needs, trying to contextualize these policies effectively.

8.3.3 Adaptive Leadership Theory: Navigating through Turbulence

In this study, novice principals assume their leadership role in deprived schools. Resuming a new position comes with professional and personal challenges. Against these challenges, novice principals use adaptive leadership to cope and thrive in their leadership roles (Heifetz et al., 2009).

8.3.3.1 Standing on the Balcony: Doing the Diagnostic Work

All the principals in this study exhibited adaptive work through a process of diagnosis, which involves collecting data, analyzing it, and implementing interventions, strategies, or actions (Heifetz et al., 2009). This diagnosis occurred at organizational and personal levels (Heifetz et al., 2009).

At the personal level, the principals engaged in introspection, carefully examining the demands of their new roles and identifying gaps in their knowledge and skills. Following this diagnosis, they sought support from critical friends and mentors to aid their professional development and learning. They also took time to understand the implications of their novice status, how others perceived them, and the expectations placed upon them. Moreover, they drew upon lessons and identities from their past experiences to serve as guiding principles in their leadership roles.

The novice principals also comprehensively diagnosed the environment in which they were leading. Through this process, they critically evaluated the deprived context, recognizing its inherent prejudices and how these factors influenced and restricted their leadership. Understanding the school's culture and dynamics was essential for principals appointed externally. For those appointed internally, they assessed the school's current status, scrutinizing

it to identify opportunities for progress. In this diagnostic work, the principals employed an open-door policy and collaborated with others, fostering relationships and creating communication channels to gather the necessary information.

Heifetz et al. (2009) caution leaders engaged in adaptive work to resist the pressure for quick fixes, which may be particularly tempting for novice principals eager to establish their leadership presence (Optlatka, 2012). Such adaptive work demands patience and resilience, as immediate solutions may unsettle those looking to the principals for guidance (Heifetz et al., 2009). To exemplify this restraint, the principals implemented small incremental changes, focused on affirming learners while shedding internalized self-perceptions, and utilized the 4Ds approach. The 4Ds involved collecting and analysing data before taking actions guided by the analysis—a process requiring patience and time. Overall, the principals effectively diagnosed and categorized their various challenges and responded appropriately to resolve them.

8.3.3.2 *Navigating the Adaptive Challenges*

As mentioned earlier, diagnosis is not an end in itself; however, it is a crucial step in understanding the diverse challenges and embarking on the delicate process of driving change. According to Heifetz (2010), leading change is arduous because it often involves potential loss. Leaders must be prepared to help individuals navigate the emotions associated with this inevitable predicament (Linsky & Lawrence, 2011). Additionally, effectively addressing adaptive challenges necessitates a commitment to learning. In this study, the principals prioritized not only their professional development but also that of others. Learning was facilitated through collaborations and by entrusting people with leadership responsibilities. As they engaged in various activities, the principals encouraged peer learning, enabling others to share and impart their skills to one another.

Moreover, addressing adaptive challenges requires individuals to discern what elements of current cultural norms are dispensable and indispensable (Heifetz, 2010). In this study, the novice principals engaged in introspection to determine which aspects of their leadership identities were essential to retain. They also examined the fundamental characteristics of their schools, preserving the bonds forged through shared histories and the culture of camaraderie. Concurrently, they relinquished dispensable elements, such as a culture of complacency that accepted the status quo when opportunities for improvement existed. Lastly, they employed various strategies, conducting experiments to identify the most viable approaches to address their challenges. One principal stated the following:

I constantly remind myself and the staff that every new thing we try makes us novices because we have never done it before. (Ubuntu)

This statement illustrates how Ubuntu and the other principals grasped the complexities of engaging in experimentation. Like Ubuntu, the other principals recognized that they were still in the process of adaptive work and experimentation, striving to find the most effective approach. They employed diverse strategies to strengthen the instructional core and adopt a holistic approach to school improvement, prioritizing the well-being of people while navigating the path to successful adaptation. The experiences of the novice principals validate the significance of adaptive work as they took a step back, conducted thorough diagnosis, and utilized various approaches based on their diagnostic findings to effectively lead their schools.

8.3.4 Context-Responsive Leadership: The Rogue Waves of a Prejudiced Context

Context-responsive leadership is a crucial theory for understanding how novice principals address challenges in deprived contexts and the context of being a novice. In this study, the terrain in which leadership was enacted is the deprived context, which shapes other contexts like “school district size, organizational culture, community context, geographic location, fiscal context, and political context” (Bredeson et al., 2011, p. 9). The novice principals demonstrated contextual intelligence, adjusting their behaviours to craft contextually driven reactions (Bredeson et al., 2011). They focused on reshaping the school culture, pushing back against obstacles to fulfil their goals.

Recognizing that the existing organizational cultures hindered school improvement, the novice principals prioritized enhancing and reshaping the school culture. They adopted a people-centered approach to repair damaged relationships and transform the mindset of those accustomed to the status quo. Through these efforts, they effectively pushed back against the obstacles, creating a more conducive environment and level playing field to achieve their goals and priorities.

In this study, I argue that the deprived context is rife with prejudice, deeply impacting individuals across various domains. The novices in this study were well aware of this prejudice. They courageously confronted and challenged it, refusing to be disheartened by it. Moreover, these principals drew inspiration from their own experiences of growing up and learning in such contexts. They transformed into visionaries, leading beyond the confines of their circumstances. In an environment where learners' rights were often disregarded, they became advocates for those rights, striving to ensure the well-being of learners and provide them with

a meaningful educational experience. In the face of child-headed households and learners living with grandparents, they adeptly navigated through the difficulties. When learners sought love, encouragement, and recognition, they offered care, motivation, and validation.

Context-responsive leadership was also pronounced in the policy terrain and how principals approached this highly politicized process. In this study, the novices acted as active policy enactors. However, as they engaged in policy adaptation, responding to the community and geographic context, they sometimes became complicit, producing unfavourable unintended circumstances. For example, some principals' actions in contextualising the admission policy had negative implications for resource allocation in a context where such resources are already constrained.

The fiscal context also created turbulence, with financial constraints straining leadership efforts. The principals had to make difficult choices, choosing which financial needs and demands could and could not be met. All these manifestations required contextual intelligence, but most importantly, intuition to navigate these issues. In this study, the novice principal's past and present experiences and imagined futures were prominent in anchoring and guiding the principals' leadership practices. We see that the principals were contextually responsive leaders who "know when, where, why, and how to push back or reshape elements of context (Bredeson et al., 2011, p. 9).

Lastly, this study stretches context-responsive leadership by asserting that the positionality of being a novice is a context. Like the other contexts already discussed above, the principals responded to this contextual variation in various ways and with the understanding that being a novice intersected with the other contexts. Upon reflection, Maqhinga and Ubuntu realised that the dynamics of being an AP and a principal are different and formed a critical friendship to aid their learning. Ntozinhle sought a mentor to capacitate and professionally develop her. The rationale behind these formations of self-initiated learning was based on the need to respond to the unique pressures of the context of their novice status, which amongst other things, includes loneliness and multiple expectations from stakeholders (Lumby, 2015; Spillane & Lee, 2014). Additionally, the principals noted the scarcity of professional development opportunities and ineffective induction. Therefore, to rise to the demands of their roles, they sought various forms of knowledge, skills, and other virtues (Bredeson et al., 2011; Kutz, 2008) through these supportive relationships.

8.3.5 The Blindspots of the Framework

In Chapter three, I described the different theories and argued for their appropriateness and the suitability of the framework for this study. Integrating sense-making, adaptive leadership, and context-responsive theories provided a robust theoretical framework to understand novice principals' experiences, actions, and responses in leading schools in deprived contexts. The theoretical reflection reveals how these theories synergistically explain identity construction, leadership enactment, and context-responsive leadership practices in deprived schools' challenging and complex environments. By considering the dynamics of self, practice, and context, this theoretical framework sheds light on the intricacies of leading in deprived settings and how novice principals strive to impact their schools. Thus, the framework offered valuable insights into the principals' identity construction, leadership enactment, and the influence of socialization on their actions. However, it had some limitations. Here, I present a reflection on some of the blindspots of the framework.

While it partially explained the influence of socialization, it did not fully capture the intricacies of this process. Moreover, the framework had limited explanatory power in understanding why the principals did not perceive their novice status as a challenge, despite being aware of the challenges associated with this position. Additionally, the framework was unable to explain why the principals did not perceive the context of deprivation as a prejudiced context presenting technical issues.

These limitations prompt us to reconsider the application of Western theories in non-Western contexts. The development and refinement of Western theories within the context of Western societies can pose challenges when trying to apply them to explain phenomena in non-Western contexts. According to Sihlongonyane (2015), one of the fundamental challenges in theorizing about the Global South is related to issues of location, positionality, and representation. Anthias (2001) emphasizes the importance of considering the specific context, the situated nature of claims and attributions, and how they are produced in complex and ever-changing settings. Additionally, this scholar asserts that positionality highlights the intersection of structure (social position and effects) and agency (social positioning, meaning, and practice) in understanding social phenomena in non-Western contexts. Taking these aspects into account is crucial for developing theories that are more inclusive, contextually relevant, and respectful of diverse perspectives and experiences in non-Western contexts, particularly the Global South.

8.4 Methodological Reflections

In this section, I will discuss methodological reflections. To read and write about the metaphoric narrative inquiry space is one thing. To be in it is quite another. I started this project on shaky ground. I was filled with anxiety and in a state of personal and professional turbulence. When I started doing my collage, I opened wounds. As I shared my collage, the wounds became even more exposed. In my first attempt at telling my story, I fell apart.

At the time, I was unaware of scholarly personal narratives or the power of stories to evoke concealed feelings. Nash (2019, p.8) states that “we do not write (speak) about things as they are or were or will be. We write (speak) about these things as we are. We are storied selves.” It was this self that had become blurred. By nature, I am not a person who dwells on the turbulences of life. Too much has happened that I have unconsciously adopted a dangerous strategy of shelving the pain. Through this shelving, I have conveniently forgotten and not dealt with experiences that have traumatized me. Bruner (1990) states that the best way to understand the self is to think of the self as a storyteller, a constructor of narratives about life. From this viewpoint, the self emerges through the multiple telling of narratives (Nash, 2004; 2019).

As I told my story, I had to find ways to contain myself and my emotions. This was difficult because new facets of the pain emerged every time I shared my story. I decided to take time out of the field. I had to face and confront this pain in solace. I am not one to expose emotion, so this shook me. As I faced my demons, the pain intensified. I had to confront this, open the shelves, own my pain, and start healing. I am still there.

My experience aided my becoming, but it also cast doubt on my ability to engage in this work as a novice researcher. My understanding of the work I was engaged in needed me to step back and realign my new understandings so I could engage in the work with an ethical antenna that would ensure that my participants did not experience harm in this project by reliving traumas I would not be able to heal. I did this by using the collage and life story grids so they could set the parameters for the stories. I also built rapport with the participants and engaged continuously outside the research project. This was not intentional, but it happened organically. We connected on a human level, and it was in this sphere where trust was created, enabling honest conversations.

Using a new methodology is challenging. In my Master’s work, I used a case study. I came into this methodology not understanding its intricacies, as earlier explained. In my first

engagements with the participants, they did not understand how their stories could be data. I remember Ntozinhle's response:

We Nokukhanya, *usungibuyisela euniversity ke manje nge collage. Ayi angazi ngizoke ngibone* (Nokukhanya, you are taking me back to my university days by doing the collage.

I am inquisitive about all of this, we will see.)

I must confess I also did not grasp this when this journey began. I had to convince myself and my participants of the research value of the arts-based methods used in this study. I gained more confidence as I engaged with my critical friends and used these methods while writing collaboratively for publication. This gave me the confidence I needed to harness the potential of the methods used in this study.

Researching upwards involves power dynamics between the researched and the researcher. In this study, it manifested because I was exploring principals, having never been a principal myself. In my MEd work, one of my participants, a principal, said they didn't understand my interest in principals, given I had not served as one. Having never been in a management position made it difficult to connect with some participants personally. In this study, building rapport, sharing my story, and using self-reflexive methodologies, which are reflexive, conversational, and reiterative, aided me in breaking this hierarchical barrier (Butler-Kisber, 2010; Butler-Kisber & Poldma, 2010).

The data co-created from the conversations from the LHI's guided by the collage in narration was "expressive and rich in meaning" (Pillay et al., 2019, p.77), evoking hidden feelings and allowing them to surface (Butler-Kisber, 2010). While this was the intention, the other effect was inherent in the methodology and methods breeding two implications. This first was detaching from the field. Being in the metaphoric parade can be seductive. I found it difficult to detach from the field. Every new story had other stories I felt needed exploration and clarification, and the plots thickened with new stories.

Once I had "detached," which I have not in the true sense, I found myself with a large data set. I was overwhelmed with the transcription and the management of the data. I completed the transcription and started with the analysis of narratives. The stories were long. Understandably, they are a construction of the self (Bruner, 1990). Given my relationship with my participants, I felt attached to all of them. Though guided by the parameters of the research puzzles, I still had difficulty in what to remove. I saw each plot interwoven with another, showing the blurs and colours in one's storied life. The novices shared what they felt was significant in their

journey. I asked myself, what justifies my choosing which stories are more important? I questioned whether my loyalty should be to the participants and their accounts or the research, dictated by constraints of the number of words and the report's length. The questions and the struggle continued. As indicated in Chapter four, I decided to reduce the number of participants from six to four. I found comfort in the timelessness of stories and the opportunities that lie ahead to retell them.

Reflecting on my experience with narrative inquiry, I found it a potent method for gathering rich data through stories. However, I was mindful of its shortcomings during my research. A significant concern was the potential subjectivity and bias in data collection, which I became aware of as I engaged with my participants. This realization prompted me to challenge my preconceived ideas about the positionality of novice principals leading in deprived school contexts, as evident in Figure 4.2: The Intersectionality Dilemma and the ensuing discussion on the single-story. Reflexivity, as emphasized by Mavin and Corelett (2017) in qualitative research, became pivotal for me. Epistemological reflexivity compelled me to recognize how my ontological and epistemological perspectives influenced my understanding of the studied phenomena (Mavin & Corelett, 2017). Being aware of my assumptions about the world and knowledge, I endeavoured to ensure their impact on my research and its findings was acknowledged and minimized.


I also acknowledged that narrative inquiry may not always provide a comprehensive or entirely accurate representation of reality due to the influence of memory, emotions, and perceptions. Additionally, I was aware that my focus on individual experiences could overshadow broader structural issues, given that my data generation plan privileged principals' stories without the perspectives of their colleagues to corroborate or challenge their claims. Nevertheless, I remained cautious of this limitation and approached it as a single story.

Another challenge I faced was the issue of generalizability, considering narratives and their uniqueness to specific individuals. To gain a deeper understanding of the complexities of novice principals leading in deprived school contexts, I propose that a longitudinal study involving multiple stakeholders would be beneficial.

Despite criticisms, I firmly believe narrative inquiry offers valuable insights into human experiences and is a powerful tool for understanding subjective realities. While I found it useful for my research, I acknowledge its limitations. Balancing the critiques and strengths of

narrative inquiry is crucial to ensure its appropriate application and enhance its credibility in the academic field.

8.5 Personal Reflections

This work is the , hence the title of my collage. These reflections are shared to demonstrate the paradoxical nature of experience. Chase (2011) describes narrative inquiry as “meaning-making through the shaping and ordering of experience” (p. 415). In this research, as earlier mentioned, I have been part of the metaphorical parade. As such, my experiences have shaped this work. They have shaped both the process and the product, and in this section, I make these personal reflections illustrating the paradox of experience.

I have carried this doctoral work through various transitions. I have transitioned with it through different roles, as mentioned in the acknowledgments of this study. Kilinc and Gumus (2021) state that role transitioning is complex and daunting (Kilinc & Gumus, 2021). According to



Daresh and Male (2000), moving from one role to another is like crossing the border. I crossed the border with it, transitioning from my role as an academic (in which I was still transitioning) to a visiting scholar at Teachers College, as stated in the acknowledgments.

Figure 8.2 Empty food shelves at a New York supermarket

I registered for this doctoral study in 2017. In the acknowledgments, I mentioned some rogue waves concerning my employment. The lack of security left me in a precarious situation, and it wasn't easy to be productive when my well-being was at stake. I defended the proposal in 2018 when I had found permanent employment and was fortunate to be part of the AALDP programme, which amongst other opportunities, presented me with the chance to be a visiting scholar at Columbia University Teachers College.

While there, Covid-19 ravaged the world, changing life as we know it. Shelves were empty at stores, countries were going under hard lockdown, flights were being cancelled, and I was stuck away from home. Luckily, I had my critical friends Nosipho and Vusi with me, and we

supported each other through this time. Our stay was cut short, and I returned to South Africa to a new world. By grace, we got the last flight to the country and landed on 26 March 2020, when the country was on the first day of hard lockdown.

I was afraid. Not knowing whether I was infected, I went into self-quarantine to protect my family. I had moved out of my apartment, so I had to go home. At that time, the USA was the epicentre, and New York had high infection rates. The first reported case had been on the 5th of March from KZN locals who had travelled from Italy. This perpetuated the narrative that “*lento ifike nabantu abaphuma phesheya*” (the virus was brought here by people who have travelled outside of South Africa), well, at least around my neighbourhood. My home is in KwaMashu. KwaMashu is a deprived context. Chapter two describes that such communities are plagued with multiple socioeconomic issues. The lockdown resulted in business closures, which exacerbated the existing challenges, and people were highly frustrated.

Word got out that I had returned from NY, and a rumour circulated that I had brought the virus into the community. My family and I were in distress. It took months for this rumour to subside, and I was literally imprisoned in my own home, unable to leave because of fear of being attacked. I cannot function in such a state, and this was another period where my work took a backseat.

The pandemic is a constant rogue wave, creating turbulence as we have all suffered and continue to suffer significant losses. Life has been relentless as we try to stay afloat in this turbulence. There has also been the incidence of load shedding—a phenomenon of electricity rationing that results in power cuts during set times. I work on the cloud, and sometimes I have lost work because it did not sync. But as you will see, this is not the worst of my trials and tribulations.

In July 2021, South Africa faced an enormous rogue wave that threatened to shake the foundation of our society. There was unrest in the country from the 9th to the 18th of that month. Violence, riots, looting, destruction, and burning of public facilities and private properties characterised this socio-political unrest, especially in the provinces of Gauteng and KZN (Elumalai et al., 2022; Vhumbunu, 2021).

Figure 8.3 Looters who were parked outside my complex



Another consequence was the racial tensions that were sparked by racial profiling and an unfortunate incident where over thirty Black lives were lost in Phoenix in race-targeted attacks on being suspected as looters (Vhumbunu, 2021). During these days, I was stuck alone in my complex because the gates were blocked by looters, as seen in the picture above. I was imprisoned again, and this rehashed the pain during the lockdown. As a community within the complex, we bartered and shared food to survive. There was a spirit of *Ubuntu*, but this was not throughout the community. When the looting subsided, I went out to hunt for food. The racial profiling was still there as some shops considered all Black bodies to be looters and refused us entry. Most shops were also closed because of the looting. The day I finally got a store that accepted Black patrons, I stood in the queue for over eight hours. The next day I had to refuel, another ten-hour wait as only a few petrol stations were opened and closed when they suspected looters were on the way. Going outside was like going to war because, in some spaces, the Black body was seen as a threat. The unrest paralysed and traumatised me, not just on all fronts. I could not work or function in this precarity. There was so much loss, the remnants of which are still felt today and will continue to haunt us in the future.

As life would have it, I kept moving. I had to. While still trying to crawl, another wave attacked in February 2022. I was in a car accident, and my car was written off. I was bedridden. I was not so much traumatised by the loss of the vehicle, which could be recovered. I was afraid about my ability to walk again, as explained in the practical justifications (1.5.1).

Figure 8.4 My bruised leg during recovery



Some things are difficult to explain because you do not have the vocabulary for them. I experienced the emotions I had felt back then, throwing me into a depressive state. I recovered from the injury by grace but was still in psychological distress. I kept moving.



Figure 8.5 *Water truck supplied by a community member delivering water*



In April 2022, a literal rogue wave in the form of floods struck KZN, damaging infrastructure and causing wide closures across various sectors. I was alone again during these floods, imprisoned by nature this time. After the floods, roads were damaged, impacting the supply of goods. Homes were flooded, families were displaced, and human life was lost. There were food shortages. I started food rationing. Water pipes burst in various areas

across the city. I had no water for thirty consecutive days, so did others. Life became about survival. Every day I would go and hunt for water and food. In week three of the water supply shutdown, we had a truck delivering water. It was rationed. This was another life-threatening situation. By grace, I survived when many others did not.

The rogue waves presented here and outlined in the acknowledgments have all been limitations to my work, impeding me physically, emotionally, mentally, and psychologically from doing my doctoral work. Appendix F is my collage. I intentionally created it on a calendar to represent the time I had lost and my delayed dreams, as articulated in the rationale (1.5.1). I did not know I would experience all these hurdles. I did not need to dig this deep again and find **RESILIENC**e to stay the course. The rogue waves presented here and outlined in the acknowledgments have all been limitations to my work, impeding me physically, emotionally, mentally, and psychologically from doing my doctoral work. They have also given me time to

immerse myself in the journey of this work and with the data. “Time lost” has given me a space to step back, reflect on the process, and strengthen the work presented here.

8.6 Contributions of the Study

This section provides the contributions of this study to knowledge. These contributions are discussed in two sections. They are leadership and context and, subsequently, novice principals, school leadership, and identity.

8.6.1 Leadership and Context

The context matters. From the 2015 Educational Management and Leadership Special Issue titled *Leading schools in contexts of multiple deprivations in South Africa*, several studies³² have advanced the argument that different leaders (principals, deputy principals, and departmental heads) leading schools located in this context are influenced by it, and they, too, shape it in various ways. This body of scholarship maintains that the contextual challenges inherent in deprived contexts make it difficult to lead. While these studies have examined this connection, they have not explicitly demonstrated that these leaders lead in the way they do because of contextual literacy, which cultivates contextual awareness.

According to Clarke and Wildy (2013), contextual awareness enables one to understand internal and external contextual complexities and then use this understanding to guide decision-making. In this study, the participating novice principals noted that they adjusted their leadership because of the context of multiple deprivations. Firstly, they shared that the context affects what they can and cannot do. Coming from similar backgrounds to those of their learners, they were able to resonate with their lived experiences. Their understanding of the socioeconomic backgrounds of their learners significantly informed their leadership practices. Explicitly demonstrating this, they focused on building relationships because of the context demands, which required all hands on deck and as many resources (human, physical, financial, and psychosocial) as possible to respond to contextual challenges. The novice principals focused on care. They understood that some learners came from homes with little care and love, and some were viewed as outcasts because of past failures, impacting their confidence and self-esteem. So, they first ensured that they restored and affirmed them so they could

³² (Bayeni, 2018; Chikoko et al., 2015; Dzimiri, 2018; Faulkner, 2015; Khuzwayo, 2018; Lumby, 2015; Maringe & Moletsane, 2015; Maringe et al., 2015; Mfeka et al., 2018; Mkhize & Bhengu, 2018; Myende, 2018; Myende et al., 2020; Naicker, 2018)

engage with the educational project. This understanding of home environments conscientized them on issues such as ill-discipline and teenage pregnancy, making them look at these as challenges inherent in society. This does not mean that the novice principals condoned these behaviors. However, they focused on providing support and aiding learners to unlearn negative behaviours.

This sensitivity to the context is extended to parents as well. The novice principals understood that learners live with guardians and grandparents and that resources are scarce. They, therefore, did not make requests that were unfounded and unrealistic. They also acted as active policy enactors, at times implementing policies differently not to disadvantage learners. This is seen through admitting learners without proper documentation, which is not in line with policy prescriptions. While some of these practices have been shared in the cited scholarship, in this study, the principals explicitly show how these practices connect with the context of deprivation. Therefore, this study contributes to the body of scholarship by showing the direct connection between the leadership practices of novice principals and the context of deprivation in which they lead.

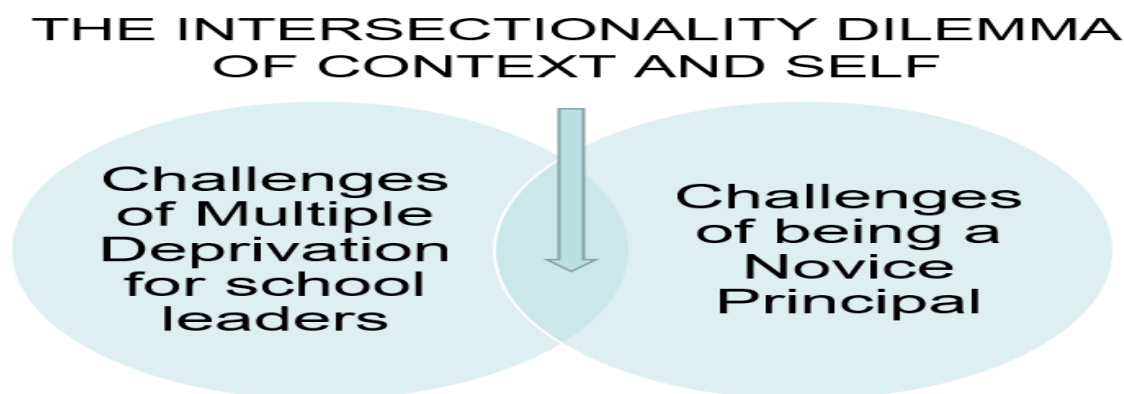
Another contribution to the context concerns the novice principals' outlook and attitudes toward the context of deprivation. The principals take the stance of troubling the context of deprivation and calling out the disadvantages that depress learning. While taking this stance, they do not dwell on this disadvantage or allow themselves to be consumed by it. Instead, the principals become transformative agents, reshaping this context under strained conditions. Lumby (2015) states that principals serving in such schools face challenges securing learners' present and future rights because they operate in an environment that relentlessly denies them. What emerged from this study is that all the novice principals come from similar backgrounds and have attended similar schools. It is this early socialisation that gives them these attitudes and resilience. Further research is, however, needed to deepen understanding of how this occurs and to understand what prepares those without experience in such a context. How do they cope if they do? What drives them, and how do they build the resilience to lead in this context? We may also want to understand what happens when people dwell on the inequalities inherent in the context?

Lastly, this study contributes to scholarship by bringing to the fore the voices of novice principals and their experiences of leadership in the deprived context. The scholarship cited and consulted for this study has primarily focused on and addressed the leadership of

experienced principals. This study has focused on novice principals leading schools in the context of multiple deprivations. It has given insights into their identities, how they enact leadership, and the factors that influence their leadership.

8.6.2 Novice Principals and School Leadership and Identity

Figure 8.6 The Intersectionality Dilemma



Leaders do not come in the blank. They may be unconscious of what they know, but they can access and cultivate leadership skills, attitudes, values, and expertise while transitioning through the initiation stage. I make this assertion because the leadership practices of novices principal are not so different from experienced principals leading in deprived school contexts. Chapter two outlined the leadership practices of principals leading deprived schools. Drawing from the scholarship³³ cited in that chapter, these principals focus on the school culture; they work collaboratively with others and focus on the instructional core to ensure the provision of quality teaching and learning and school improvement.

In this study, similar leadership patterns were found. The novice principals adopted an open-door policy to make themselves accessible and build relationships with others. They worked collaboratively with internal and external stakeholders, forging partnerships to mobilize resources and identify the skills and talents of others so they could draw on these to initiate school improvement. The principals worked tirelessly to reshape and strengthen the school culture. Additionally, they led with care to secure the well-being of their learners and the schooling community. Cognisant of the context, they became active policy enactors shaping

³³ (Bayeni, 2018; Chikoko et al., 2015; Dzimir, 2018; Faulkner, 2015; Khuzwayo, 2018; Lumby, 2015; Maringe & Moletsane, 2015; Maringe et al., 2015; Mfeka et al., 2018; Mkhize & Bhengu, 2018; Myende, 2018; Myende et al., 2018; Naicker, 2018)

policies to accommodate the circumstances of their school. This then begs us to revisit the double dilemma, and perhaps we may assume that their newness actually becomes capital.

This suggests that novice principals assume their role with capital from previous experiences. While other scholars have made these connections (Moorosi & Grant, 2018; Miscenko & Day, 2016; Lord & Hall, 2005), in this study, the use of life history interviews and narrative inquiry methodology gave space for an in-depth exploration. The findings affirm previous research but also stretch it by showing that early experiences are a powerful socialising agent for novice principals and that they rely heavily on their identities while in the induction phase of their transitioning period. This does not discount the need for leadership preparation, experience, and ongoing professional development. It begs us to ask, how do they do this? Further probes into novice principals using various methodological approaches are needed to answer this question. While noting this, further research is also necessary to understand how these novice principals extract positive lessons from the influx of experiences. What would happen if they embodied some toxic behaviours and negative socialisation? What would their leadership repertoire look like in this instance?

In this study, I was also able to demonstrate how identity influences leadership and how being a novice shapes practice. The novice principals are concerned with stamping their presence as principals and validating their leadership (Spillane & Lee, 2014). While the studies (Moorosi & Grant, 2018; Miscenko & Day, 2016; Lord & Hall, 2005) on identities show how early socialisation can influence how leaders approach their leadership tasks, this study has gone further to detail how growing up in the context with multiple deprivations can actually prepare one to lead in such a context. The study has further contributed to practical ways through which family values and experiences can serve as a compass guiding principals' leadership, showing the connections between being a novice principal, a school leader, and identity. The study has revealed who novice principals are. Beyond the questions on whether leadership preparation matters, the study shows that some leadership skills are learned through a socialisation process before principals are aware they will be principals.

8.7 Implications and Recommendations of the Study

The findings showed that the participating novice principals used different sets of experiences in becoming leaders, and through these experiences, they decided what type of leaders they wanted to be. This suggests that learning to and becoming a good principal is left to chance to these principals, and there are no specifics of leadership that the department on its side has in

mind for these principals. The danger is that the department will have to pay the bill if principals develop unproductive leadership traits. Therefore, this implies a need to look at who novice principals are and how we can draw from their identities to address their learning needs and aid them in a conscious engagement and commitment to identity work.

8.7.1 Research Community

Scholarship around novice principals is still sparse. Additionally, studies exploring their experiences using self-reflexive methodologies are scarce. Researchers should explore the experiences of novice principals through multiple methodological approaches to reveal all the nuances of their multifaceted experiences. Such studies, as demonstrated by this research, may disrupt the single narrative that novices are individuals who are unable to navigate the challenges they experience.

8.7.2 Aspiring and Practising Captains (Novice Principals)

Aspiring principals should be proactive in their preparation for their future role. They should seek opportunities to learn and find mentors who are experienced principals to guide them. Novice principals who have already been appointed must also take the initiative to further their development by finding supportive colleagues and mentors and participating in professional learning communities. Despite the challenges that come with professional learning being left to their own devices, novice principals must be adaptable and find ways to effectively navigate their leadership role.

8.7.3 The Department of Basic Education

This study has illustrated the complexities experienced by novice principals leading schools in deprived contexts. Glaringly, what emerges is that there are insufficient support mechanisms to professionally develop and provide ongoing, tailored support for novice principals leading these schools. Based on these findings, I recommend that the DBE revisit the processes and procedures for the assumption of duties. The induction of novice principals should occur before they resume their duties. These principals are unlike other principals who have served before. As such, their induction should consider this and ensure they are capacitated in advance to fulfil their responsibilities.

Additionally, CESs should provide ongoing professional development support for their district's cohort of novice principals. The meetings called for all principals are not enough as these principals have particular needs that are not the same as those with experience. In some cases, NPs may find it difficult to engage and participate in these meetings because such spaces

are hierarchical and fuelled by tensions and power relations. Creating focused platforms for novice principals would make these liminal spaces where they could freely share their challenges and ideas in safe spaces. At the same time, they would still benefit from the meetings with all other principals and learn from their experiences as well.

Without a formal leadership preparation programme, the DBE needs to be intentional about the professional socialisation of teachers at all levels. The DBE needs to provide integrated developmental activities, so aspiring novice principals are conscious that these opportunities are learning opportunities and preparation for principalship should they desire to ascend to this role.

The issue of data-driven decision-making seems to be a system-wide problem. The DBE should ensure the validity of school data, reduce the red tape in correcting incorrect data, and implement strict accountability measures around procurement. This has dire implications for schools in deprived contexts, as these schools already have limited resources. For example, incorrect data regarding learner enrolment impacts staffing and funding allocation causing a further strain in these schools.

8.8 Final Word: Docking the Vessel

The study explored novice principals' experiences leading schools in deprived contexts. The inquiry was guided by three research puzzles seeking to illuminate who the novice principals are, an identity question wanting to uncover the identities of the principals before and during their tenure. The second research puzzle sought to understand the leadership practices of novice principals. Research puzzle three sought to uncover why novice principals leading schools in the context of deprivation enact leadership in the ways they do. One of the aspects that need to be noted is that it presents the stories of principals whereas the schools has a number of people who receive and exercise leadership with principals therefor there is a need for another study to engage all these

Using narrative inquiry as a methodology and life history interviews to generate data for these three puzzles, the study demonstrates that the participating principals have multiple identities construed. These identities serve as a compass, guiding and shaping their leadership practices. The leadership practices of the novice principals in this study are not that different from those of other seasoned and successful principals. Like the seasoned and successful principals, the participating novice principals used a variety of leadership approaches and practices to lead

their schools. Their leadership is influenced by the context of multiple deprivations in which their schools are located. It is also influenced by the context of the positionality of being a novice principal.

The findings present a counter-narrative to the commonly held view of novice principals as challenged and limited in their leadership abilities. As stated before, it is not that they do not experience difficulties; they do. However, there are other stories, like the story told in this dissertation. This is important and requires future research to interrogate this positionality, using a variety of methodologies and methods to uncover the nuances of being a novice principal. For now, I dock the vessel.

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Appendix A: Ethical Clearance



20 June 2018

Mrs Nokukhanya Satimburwa (204519702)
School of Education
Edgewood Campus

Dear Mrs Satimburwa,

Protocol reference number: HSS/0463/018D

Project Title: Leading schools in the context of multiple deprivation: Early career principals lived experiences

Approval Notification – Expedited Application

In response to your application received 16 May 2018, the Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee has considered the abovementioned application and the protocol has been granted **FULL APPROVAL**.

Any alteration/s to the approved research protocol i.e. Questionnaire/Interview Schedule, Informed Consent Form, Title of the Project, Location of the Study, Research Approach and Methods must be reviewed and approved through the amendment /modification prior to its implementation. In case you have further queries, please quote the above reference number.

PLEASE NOTE: Research data should be securely stored in the discipline/departments for a period of 5 years.

The ethical clearance certificate is only valid for a period of 3 years from the date of issue. Thereafter Recertification must be applied for on an annual basis.

I take this opportunity of wishing you everything of the best with your study.

Yours faithfully



Professor Shenuka Singh (Chair)

/ms

Cc Supervisor: Dr Phumlani E Myende
Cc Academic Leader Research: Dr SB Khoza
Cc School Administrator: Ms Tyzer Khumalo

Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee

Professor Shenuka Singh (Chair)

Westville Campus, Govan Mbeki Building

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Website: www.ukzn.ac.za



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Appendix B: Gatekeepers Letter (Department of Basic Education)



education

Department:
Education
PROVINCE OF KWAZULU-NATAL

Enquiries: Phindile Duma

Tel: 033 392 1063

Ref.:2/4/8/1552

Mrs N Satimburwa
K2075 KwaMashu
Durban
4359

Dear Mrs Satimburwa

PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN THE KZN DoE INSTITUTIONS

Your application to conduct research entitled: **"LEADING SCHOOLS IN THE CONTEXT OF MULTIPLE DEPRIVATION: EARLY CAREER PRINCIPALS' LIVED EXPERIENCES"**, in the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education Institutions has been approved. The conditions of the approval are as follows:

1. The researcher will make all the arrangements concerning the research and interviews.
2. The researcher must ensure that Educator and learning programmes are not interrupted.
3. Interviews are not conducted during the time of writing examinations in schools.
4. Learners, Educators, Schools and Institutions are not identifiable in any way from the results of the research.
5. A copy of this letter is submitted to District Managers, Principals and Heads of Institutions where the Intended research and interviews are to be conducted.
6. The period of investigation is limited to the period from 01 June 2018 to 01 October 2020.
7. Your research and interviews will be limited to the schools you have proposed and approved by the Head of Department. Please note that Principals, Educators, Departmental Officials and Learners are under no obligation to participate or assist you in your investigation.
8. Should you wish to extend the period of your survey at the school(s), please contact Miss Phindile Duma at the contact numbers below.
9. Upon completion of the research, a brief summary of the findings, recommendations or a full report/dissertation/thesis must be submitted to the research office of the Department. Please address it to The Office of the HOD, Private Bag X9137, Pietermaritzburg, 3200.
10. Please note that your research and interviews will be limited to schools and institutions in KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education.

(PLEASE SEE LIST OF SCHOOLS ATTACHED)

Dr. EV Nzama
Head of Department: Education
Date: 19 June 2018

KWAZULU-NATAL DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Postal Address: Private Bag X9137 • Pietermaritzburg • 3200 • Republic of South Africa
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Facebook: KZNDoe...Twitter: @DBE_KZN...Instagram: [kzn_education](https://www.instagram.com/kzn_education)...Youtube: [kzndoe](https://www.youtube.com/kzndoe)

..Championing Quality Education - Creating and Securing a Brighter Future

Appendix C: Gatekeepers Letter (Schools)



3135

2 February 2021

Dear Nokukhanya

I have received your request to conduct research in my school, and I am pleased to inform you that the SMT has decided to grant permission to you to conduct the study at the school. This permission is conditional on the approval from the Department of Basic Education and the University of KwaZulu Natal granting ethical clearance to conduct the study.

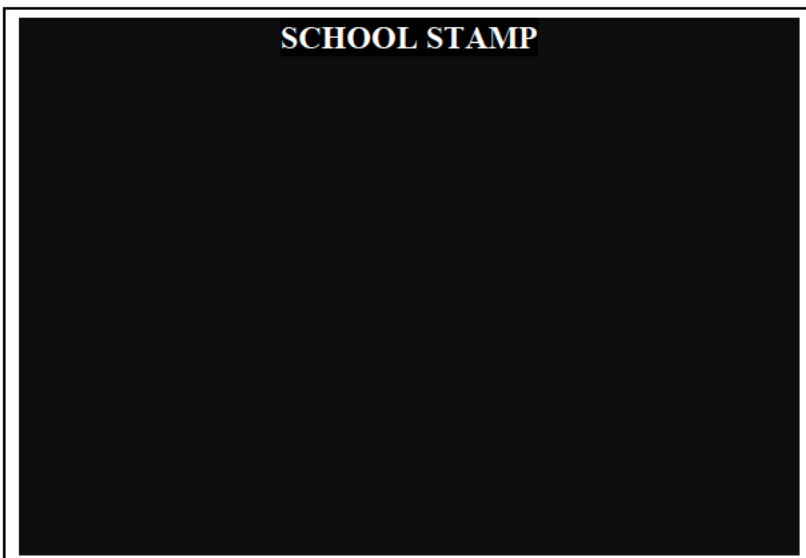
You are advised that no research activities must be conducted during teaching and learning hours, and participants must be protected at all times. You are further informed that the school management holds the right to withdraw this consent should the research disturb teaching and learning.

Kind regards,

A black rectangular box redacting the signature of the school representative.

A black rectangular box redacting the signature of the school representative.

SCHOOL STAMP



Appendix D: Informed Consent

56 Mariann Dale
1 Amand Place
Pinetown
3610
02 February 2021

Dear [REDACTED]

I am currently studying for a Doctor of Philosophy degree at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, School of Education (Edgewood campus). As part of the requirements for this degree, I am conducting a research project to explore the lived experiences of novice principals who lead schools in a context with multiple deprivations.

The study is titled “**Leading schools in the context of multiple deprivations: Novice principals’ lived experiences.**” The first aim of the study is to gain insight into who are the novice principals leading schools in the context of multiple deprivations? That is a question of their personal and professional identities. The study further seeks to establish how novice principals’ personal and professional identity intersects and influences how they enact leadership. Additionally, the study aims to highlight how the context of multiple deprivations influences how leadership is enacted. Lastly, the study will aim to unveil the challenges faced by early-career principals and the survival strategies that are adopted when leading in the context of multiple deprivations.

To achieve the aims stipulated above, I humbly request your participation. You are requested to participate in a life history interview. The interview is expected to be a minimum of 60 minutes. Given that this interview entails you sharing your life story, we will have multiple conversations. I will also request that you provide me with any significant memorabilia (artefacts) we will use as conversation starters for the discussions. Before the talks, I will ask that you fill in a short questionnaire that will provide me with your biographical information. I will need to tape-record the discussions to ensure that all your views are captured during the conversation. However, this will only happen with your permission. Throughout the study and in reporting, you will remain anonymous, and the information you provide will remain confidential to you and the researcher. It is also guaranteed that the information you provide will only be used for research purposes. It will be stored safely in the University for five years and destroyed after.

Please note that permission to participate in the study does not equal any rewards and is only voluntary. While it does not bring any good to the study, you have a full right to withdraw your participation at any stage, and you will face no negative consequences due to your withdrawal. The date, time, and venue for the discussions will be arranged in consultation with you.

Yours Sincerely
Nokukhanya Ndlovu
Cell no. 078 398 7706
Office: 033 260 6131
Email address: satimburwan@ukzn.ac.za

Supervisor: Prof. Phumlani Myende
Tel no.: 031 260 2054
Email: myendep@ukzn.ac.za

DECLARATION

(To be completed by the participant)

<i>Please tick where appropriate</i>	YES	NO
I consent to a face-to-face interview	×	
I consent that the interview can be recorded	×	
I consent that I will make a collage	×	
I acknowledge that I can withdraw from the study at any time	×	

I, [REDACTED] confirm that I understand the contents of this document and the nature of the research project, and I consent to participate in the research project.

I understand that I can withdraw from the project at any time should I desire.

[REDACTED]

Participant's signature

2 March 2021

Date

Appendix E: Turnitin Report

Turnitin - Originality Report - PHD - Google Chrome

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PHD
By NdlovuNokukhanya

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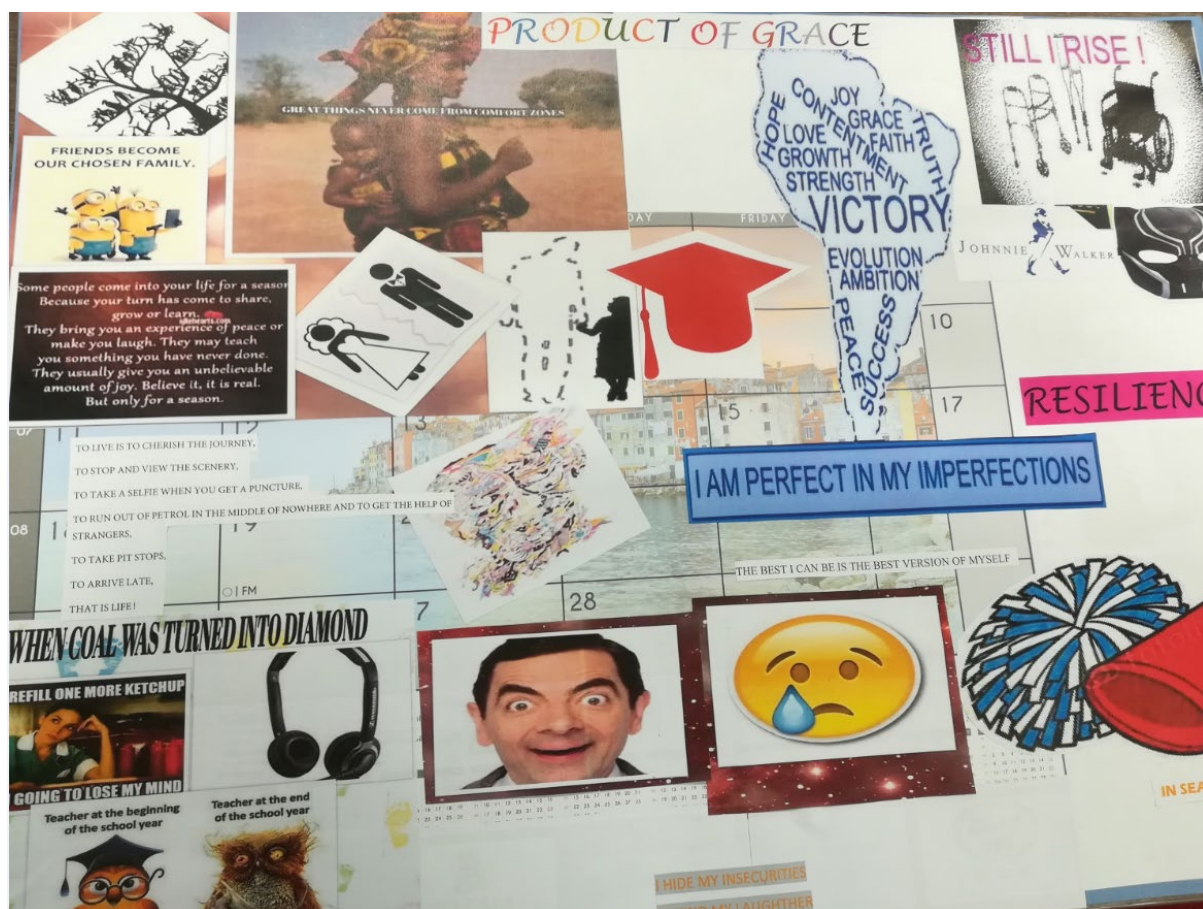
CHAPTER ONE THE SEA ROAD FOR THE MAIDEN VOYAGE 1.1 Introduction Welcome to the harbour as we prepare to sail on a maiden voyage to an unknown terrain. My participants are novice principals, on their first assignment, tasked with captaining and leading schools in deprived contexts. In this thesis, I narrate the tales of my participants' voyage. This chapter serves as the sea road, the route of this tale, pinpointing the coordinates of this thesis. Driven and motivated by the approach (narrative research) adopted in exploring the participants' voyage, this thesis is themed with metaphors as headings. Metaphors are a creative way to evoke and capture the imagination (Badley, 2020; Sword, 2012). They texture the writing enriching the telling of tales by simultaneously informing, engaging, amusing, or intriguing the reader (Badley, 2020). I write this thesis in a scholarly personal narrative style. I draw from Nash (2004), where I include many personal stories and experiences. I also use formal and informal writing and retain vernacular language and expressions in some parts (Nash, 2004). As Nash (2004, p.8) suggested, I use the above ways of expression to speak

of the "real world that each of us narrativizes, the storied world that each of us inhabits" 9

" Firstly, I will prove the background of the study, giving a broad gaze around school leadership, novice principals, and the deprived school context. The next stop is the statement of the problem. I elucidate the intersectional experience

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Ngidi, Sihle Siyabonga.. "Identities of principals leading successful schools in deprived contexts: a narrative inquiry.", 2019
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Appendix F: Collage (Nokukhanya)



Appendix G: Collage (Ntozinhle)



Appendix H: Collage (Ubuntu)



Appendix I: Collage (Maqhinga)



Appendix H: Editing Certificate

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This is to confirm that I have undertaken language editing of a thesis by Nokukhanya Ngcobo, entitled *“Navigating Uncharted Waters”: Lived Experiences of Novice Principals Leading in a Deprived School Context.*



27th January 2023