

# **SCHOOL PRINCIPALS' UNDERSTANDING AND EXPERIENCES OF LEADERSHIP**

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## **ABSTRACT**

The purpose of this study was to explore principals' understanding and experiences of school leadership. The task of principals is to create learning spaces for everyone in the school and to develop them into productive leaders. It is, therefore, important to find out how principals perceive leadership and how they, through their experiences of leadership, create learning environments conducive for teaching and learning. Hence, this study adopted the transformational leadership concepts to explore the leadership experiences of the principals.

A qualitative case study within the interpretive paradigm was adopted to explore the understanding and experiences of leadership of three principals. Qualitative research seeks to explain and understand social phenomena within its natural setting. It focuses on the meaning people have constructed about their world and the researcher is the primary instrument for data generation and analysis. The study attempted to make sense of the respondents' life-worlds by interacting with them, appreciating and clarifying the meanings they ascribed to their experiences. Data was generated by means of semi-structured interviews and reflective journal writing and was analysed throughout the research process.

The findings show that there was a general consensus amongst the principals in their understanding of leadership. What emerged from this research is that the principals realised that through their leadership, they have to play a leading role in transforming their schools into institutions of professional places of teaching and learning. For them leadership was characterised by concepts such as collective endeavours, collaborative decision making and a high degree of personal and professional standards. Their understanding and experiences of leadership also show the need for principals to build positive and trusting relationships with their staff and other stakeholders; have a caring attitude and showing understanding for the needs of others. The participants concurred that the route to lead schools better, to ensure that they become professional places of teaching and learning is rooted in fostering trusting relationships amongst themselves, the staff, parents and the community. However, their experiences of these concepts varied in accordance with their respective circumstances.

In conclusion, principals must constantly communicate a clear set of values and develop a shared vision for their school. Principals must promote and care about learners and teachers' learning. They must create opportunities for collaborative learning among staff and continual professional development. By doing so, these approaches by progressive principals create spaces for their schools to become professional places of teaching and learning, ready to cope with a changing and complex environment.

## DECLARATION

I, Ursula Maria Caroline Kraft, declare that the work presented in this dissertation is my own work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

Student

I declare that this dissertation has been submitted with/without my approval.

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

Professor V. Chikoko

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First and foremost, I acknowledge herein my dependence on my Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. I thank Him for all the blessings, lessons, and triumphs throughout this journey. None of this would be possible without His Mercy, Grace and Love.

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## **DEDICATION**

I dedicate this thesis to my family. It is as much their achievement as it is mine.

## **LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS**

ACE-SL	Advanced Certificate in Education-School Leadership
BA	Bachelor of Arts
CAPS	Curriculum Assessment Policy Statement
DBE	Department of Basic Education
DoE	Department of Education
HOD	Head of Department
IQMS	Integrated Quality Management Services
NCSL	National College for School Leadership
OBE	Outcomes Based Education
SACE	South African Council of Education
SASA	South African Schools Act
SGB	School Governing Body
SMT	School Management Team
UKZN	University of KwaZulu-Natal
UNISA	University of South Africa

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# CHAPTER ONE

## ORIENTATION TO THE STUDY

### 1.1 Introduction

This chapter introduces my research to the reader. The study explores principals' understanding and experiences of leadership. My point of departure is to give an overview of the study by discussing the background, the statement of the problem and the research questions that were answered by the study. This is followed by the purpose and rationale for the study. Next, I briefly highlight the delimitations and significance of the study. Finally I present an outline of the thesis.

### 1.2 Background

Research has shown that school principals' leadership practices play a significant role in school reform (Toale, 2013; Botha, 2004; Fultz, 2011; Steyn & Mashaba, 2014; Schulze, 2014). Many education systems, including the South African system, are introducing major changes in order to adjust to an ever-changing world (Botha, 2004). These educational reforms are accompanied by increased responsibilities and accountabilities for everyone working in school, the principal in particular (Grobler, Bisschoff & Beeka, 2012). These scholars confirm that the challenge of delivering quality leadership and management in school is closely linked to the quality of the principal's leadership approach and style. These reforms also challenge the principal to initiate a culture of excellence that cuts across an entire institution (Grobler et al., 2012).

Furthermore, Chikoko, Naicker and Mthiyane (2011) maintain that South African school principals encounter a host of contextual demands and challenges in the leading and managing of their schools. They state that these demands and challenges include inter alia “ the ever changing legislation, policies and regulations; establishing a culture of teaching and learning; improving and maintaining high educational standards; collaborating with parents; dealing with diversity; managing change and conflict; coping with limited resources; ensuring more accountability to their respective communities and coping with issues outside

schools that may have bearing on their jurisdiction” (Chikoko et al., 2011, p. 371). I concur, the process of change is not easy to implement in schools and principals find it difficult to successfully do so.

Consequently, Prew (2007) posits that these change initiatives work from the premise that high quality principal leadership can make a positive difference in education. Thus with the introduction of democratic schooling in South Africa it became inevitable that principals would have to change their leadership styles in keeping with the Constitution and the South African Schools Act (SASA) 84 of 1996. This profound change views principals as visionaries and leading professionals who share leadership with all stakeholders in school. For the achievement of these transformational goals of the South African education system an effective participatory leadership is needed. Faced with these dynamics of changes, the principal’s responsibilities in a new dispensation of democratic schooling in South Africa need to be explored (Steyn, 2002). Principals need strong leadership skills to successfully bring about school improvement in the twenty-first century. In addition school leadership is important to create surroundings in which schooling can take place.

Leithwood and Riehl (2003) suggest that excellent schools have highly effective principals. Thus the researcher is of the view that how principals approach their position and its ultimate impact on students, teachers, the school environment and all stakeholders, depends on their leadership style. Hence, it is important that we gain a deep understanding regarding how school leadership is perceived and experienced in the context of the South African schooling system as is often the case in developing countries.

It is on the basis of this background that this study aims to explore how principals understand and experience leadership in their respective schools. In addition, this study is not intended to exist in isolation, but aims to build on existing literature and attempts to take it further to gain deeper insight and understanding of principals’ perceptions and experiences of leadership.

### **1.3 Statement of the Problem**

This study focussed on the principals’ understanding and experiences of leadership. Within this focus, this study seeks to address the following critical question:

- What are the principals’ understanding and experiences of school leadership?

## **1.4 Research Questions**

The study was guided by the following three sub-questions:

- What is the principals' understanding of leadership?
- How do principals experience their leadership roles?
- What are the factors affecting their leadership experiences?

## **1.5 Focus and Purpose of the Study**

The focus of this study is on principals' understanding and experiences of leadership. The purpose is to find out from their understanding and experiences of school leadership how school principals lead and manage schools to develop them into professional centres of teaching and learning.

I elected to focus on three school principals. I believe there is a need to gather information from these principals regarding their experiences and understanding of school leadership. Whilst I acknowledge that the trend in education today is towards joint decision-making and power-sharing, the principal is still the cog around which the school rotates and ultimate accountability rests with him or her. Hence, my study includes case study data from three principals in order to gain greater insight to their understandings, practices and experiences of school leadership. Such information, I believe, has the potential capacity to improve the understanding of leadership in our schools and shape future actions and policies to better prepare principals for their responsibilities. Therefore, I also view the professional development of principals as imperative in equipping them with the required skills, to cope in this ever changing educational environment (Mestry & Singh 2007; Msila & Mtshali, 2011).

## **1.6 Rationale**

My interest in school leadership is rooted in my professional experiences, initially as a Level One teacher, then as part of the School Management Team (SMT) and recently as Senior Education Specialist.

My teaching career has spanned over thirty years. For twenty nine of these years I taught under several principals, in the old system of education, through transformation and into the

new dispensation. During this time, I observed a variety of leadership and management skills unique to each personality.

For some of the principals change became too much of a challenge, to the extent that they opted for an early exit from the system. Others made valiant attempts to adapt, but later succumbed to changed circumstances and also left the system. Those who remained in the education system faced challenges such as greater autonomy in school governance, increased devolution of school management responsibility, labour relations and performance management to which they had never been exposed in the old dispensation. This made the task of running schools extremely challenging as some of these fields were uncharted waters (e.g. Section 21 schools have control over their finances, maintenance of school grounds and buildings, recommending the appointment of teachers, the purchase of learner and support material to mention but a few of the tasks that now reside in the jurisdiction of the Principal and the School Governing Body). This new approach to school governance really proved to be a challenge for these principals who were used to receiving and executing directives from departmental officials (Gultig & Butler, 1999). This view is also substantiated by the Department of Education's Task Team Report (1996) which states that these changes in the new democratisation of governance in schools caused many principals to be ill-prepared for their new role.

Some principals saw the introduction of teacher unions as a direct threat to their authority. They adopted a confrontationist approach which caused tension not only between themselves and union members, but also caused tension among staff members which in turn negatively affected the culture of teaching and learning. This concurs with the opinion expressed by Portin, Shen and Williams (cited in Steyn, 2002, p.266), who postulate that "school principals whose background is power-centred are likely to lack knowledge and skills required for participative leadership." Other principals opted for a laissez faire attitude which impacted negatively on the school as it led to a break down in discipline with unions wielding too much power over principals.

Towards the latter part of my teaching career at school level, a third category of principals tried to adapt to this new era by adopting an approach of partnership in education. The trend reflected a move towards a consultative approach which culminated in shared decision making. The response of the teachers to this approach was both interesting and varied. Some

showed no interest as there were no prospects of any financial remuneration for volunteering to do additional work. Many teachers continued in the mode of complacency, waiting to be given instructions instead of taking the initiative, simply because they believed that the school principal's responsibility is to lead and the teachers to follow (Grant, 2006). They had become accustomed over the years to their comfort zone.

A small percentage of teachers embraced this new approach as an opportunity to develop their teaching career by taking on leadership roles. What finally emerged for me was that being an effective principal depends to a large degree on good relationships and effective communication skills with teachers. These observations aroused my curiosity to explore the kind of experiences principals have of leadership which influence them to create learning spaces for successful learner experiences.

### **1.7 Delimitations**

The following delimitations apply to this study: This study confined itself to exploring the understanding and experiences of leadership of three school principals only. Data were not collected from teachers, learners or parents.

### **1.8 Significance of the Study**

The pivotal role of the principal cannot be underestimated during this period of transformation to lead and manage schools to ensure that they become professional centres of teaching and learning. The benefit of this investigation is derived from the fact that it gives an understanding of how the participants understood and experienced their leadership roles. Some important outcomes surfaced from this study which confirm the views of the U.S. Senate (cited in Sergiovanni, 2001, p. 99) that it is the principal's leadership that "sets the tone within and beyond the school, the climate for learning, the level of professionalism and morale of teachers and the degree of concern for what students may or may not become."

This study attempts to inform a broader professional forum, namely the decision-makers in the Department of Education, supervisors, principals and other stakeholders about the current understandings and experiences of school leadership. It might give insight to policymakers on how best to design policies that could lend support to principals regarding their personal

growth in ensuring that schools become professional places of teaching and learning. I believe that this study can make a small contribution to the current debate on how principals can best be trained and capacitated to create learning environments which open up opportunities for learner success.

### **1.9 Outline of the Thesis**

The thesis is structured as follows: In the first chapter I present a brief background to the study, its purpose and rationale. In Chapter Two, I outline and discuss the literature reviewed in relation to leadership and the theoretical framework. Chapter Three, discusses the study's research methodology. In the fourth chapter, I present the findings and discussion of the research. The focus of Chapter Five is on the conclusion of my findings and recommendations.



## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **2.1 Introduction**

As I have mentioned in Chapter 1, the focus of this study is on the principals' understanding and experiences of leadership. This review will draw from both national and international studies to explore and gain greater insight into the aspects of leadership within the contexts of schools. The aim is to arrive at an understanding of how principals perceive leadership and what their actual experiences are of this concept in their respective schools.

I begin with a discussion and definition of the broader terms "leadership" and "management" as the foundations underpinning the concept of school leadership. Then a discussion on school leadership follows to explore what these studies may imply about principals' understanding of leadership at various levels of school leadership. I also attempt to look at the important role school principals play in creating conditions conducive for teaching and learning. Next, there is a discussion on school context and leadership. Thereafter, some theories of leadership are discussed with a focus on transformational leadership theory. A conclusion will summarise and synthesise the review.

#### **2.2 Leadership**

While there is agreement on the importance of leadership, its definition is much less clear. When one navigates through the literature on leadership, it becomes apparent that there are multiple definitions that have been given to the leadership construct, yet there is not one conceptualisation of leadership (Sergiovanni, 2001).

For example Wilzem, Van Dyk and Coetzer (2002) state that numerous authors view leadership as the ability to influence others towards the achievement of intended goals. This assertion is supported by the views of Bass (1990); Yukl (2002); Leithwood (2005) and the Department of Education (2004) that two functions are considered to be pivotal in the definition of leadership namely setting direction and exercising influence. The successful

leader is one who builds up the leadership of others on an ongoing basis for sustainable reform (Fullan, 2006).

Therefore, according to Leithwood and Riehl (2003, p.3) this definition of leadership has several important implications in the schooling context, namely: “that leaders do not merely impose goals on followers, they work with and through others to create a shared sense of purpose and direction and that leadership is a function more than a role.” Christie (2010) adds to the debate on this concept. For her, leadership is characterised by influence and consent to achieving certain goals, rather than coercion and since there is an exercise of power it should entail ethical considerations.

Consequently, leadership from an educational perspective is assumed to be the process by which school principals direct and influence educators and learners to perform educational tasks. Moreover, I believe like Barth, 1988; Khumalo, 2009 and Mokoena, 2011 that in order to achieve these tasks principals must create and maintain an environment to assist all teachers and learners to work to their full potential. These scholars maintain that as a leader the principal should be unambiguous when giving instructions to teachers on what is expected of them. By giving clear direction as a leader, minimises confusion amongst teachers (Khumalo, 2009).

Additionally, Bush (2007) argues that while leadership is seen as a process of influencing others, such influence must be informed by shared values. He further maintains that the leader should have the capacity to communicate and articulate this vision effectively. I concur with this view which suggests that principals as leaders need to build interpersonal relationships based on a philosophy of respect. They need to reflect their own personality, leadership styles and values because it is their own character that is critical in influencing others to follow them (Gupton, 2003; Graf, Roberts & Gulot, 2011).

Likewise, Grant (2010, p.232) is more explicit in her opinion that leadership is about “tapping into the potential of all people in the organisation and using these effectively in a trajectory of relating, learning, leading and growing.” This is true, because organisations are portrayed by the pursuit of common objectives, which require all members to work towards the attainment of these goals. Though this study of leadership considers the role and actions of the school principal as the appointed leader, its focus is also on the potential leadership skills of staff members which can be harnessed in the best interest of the institution.

According to Bush (2003) the major function of leadership is to unify people around shared values towards a purposeful goal. Shared values are important as they serve as a moral compass and a mainstay for the work of school leaders. However, Grant (2010) argues that leadership does not reside in the principal alone; rather, a school leader is expected to build learning situations for everyone in the school environment so that they can develop into dynamic leaders. This is similar to views expressed by Rost (1991); Bush (2008); Barth (2003) and Slater (2008) that leadership cannot exist if influence is just from the top down. These authors expand the argument that for something to be called leadership, both followers and leaders must be given the opportunity to lead and need not be equal, but in any given period of time both share the burdens and obligations of leadership. Sergiovanni (2006) states that leadership acts must be purposeful and should not be motivated by personal gain or bureaucratic requirements, but by a desire to better serve the shared purposes of the institution. In line with this thinking the Department of Education (2004) states that strong leadership needs to be developed to effectively facilitate change and lead schools and create effective linkages with the immediate community and other stakeholders. A number of studies (Sergiovanni, 2001; Christie, 2001; Coleman, 2003; Harris & Lambert, 2003; Leithwood & Riehl, 2003; Fullan, 2007; Pont, Nusche & Moorman, 2008; Hallinger & Heck, 2010; Fultz, 2011; Schulze, 2014 ) on effective leadership, school development and improvement show that schools identified as successful or effective possess competent and sound leadership. Huber (2004, p.670) states that these studies point to “the school leader as the essential change agent who influences the school to develop into a learning organisation or not.”

The above definitions reflect some of the debate on what leadership is, or should be. What is clear from these descriptions of leadership is that the school principal’s role has become extremely intricate. To understand leadership we must look beyond the leader to the whole leadership landscape involving people, institutional structures and power relations (Brooker, 2005). I am aware that in this study each principal’s understanding of leadership will have an impact on his or her experience of leadership.

So, in the context of this study and given the definitions of leadership by various scholars, I take the general definition of leadership to mean the ability to implement change, exercise influence, establish direction, motivate and inspire, to have confidence and vision, aligning people, effective communication, team building, being accountable, shared decision making

and to display a high degree of integrity (Fullan, 2001; Sergiovanni, 2006; Bass, 2008; Yukl, 2010; Gorton & Alston, 2012; Preedy, Bennet & Wise, 2012).

In the context of any school or organisation leadership is often twinned with management therefore it is necessary to explain the term management.

### **2.3 Management**

A good grasp of the concept of management is important if one is to understand leadership, primarily because in an organisation like a school, the principal is often expected to fulfil both leadership and management activities.

Management is mainly the process of managing people, money or things; a practical activity. Management of people is the most difficult, because to manage the other two, the manager must work with and through people. Thus a manager's main job activities are, for the most part concerned with the management of people (Ehlers & Lazenby, 2007). This position is further substantiated by Spillane, Halverson and Diamond (2004) and Northouse (2010) who suggest that management is to do with achieving set goals. Simply, management is to meet the daily expectations of the institution in question (Kotter, 1990). Scholars such as Bush (2008) and Davidson and Griffin (2000) describe educational management as a set of activities performed by someone in charge to achieve the organisational goals in an efficient and effective manner. If there is no management, chaos is likely to be the result. Management maintains order, consistency, profits, routine direction and quality in organizations (Spillane, Halverson & Diamond, 2004). Kroon (in Sekhu, 2011) maintains that there are six additional management functions embedded within this role namely: communication, motivation, coordination, disciplining, delegating, decision-making, and conflict management.

However, Bush (2008) cautions that unless there is a clear link between purpose and management, there is a threat of overemphasising the process and procedures whilst losing sight of the purpose and values. In other words managers must not only concentrate on the 'how' and lose sight of the 'what'. Working towards the realisation of educational aims is important, yet these must be aims and objectives agreed upon by all the stakeholders of the school (Bush, 2008).

While leadership is the primary focus of this study, it should be acknowledged that the principal spends the bulk of his or her day on administrative and managerial activities. For the purpose of this study the term management is used to refer to efforts to improve the organisational performance of “school effectiveness, school efficiency and school relevance” (Thurlow, 2003, p.33). It is a process to which all contribute and in which everyone in an organisation ought to be involved (SASA-Act 84 of 1996).

The two concepts, management and leadership are distinct but complementary in systems of actions. Both functions are needed in complex organisations like schools. The one will not replace the other, rather they complement each other.

#### **2.4 Leadership and Management**

In a school setting, the concept of managing overlaps with that of leadership. Cuban (cited in Bush 2007, p.392) provides a clear distinction between leadership and management. He links leadership with change, while management is seen as a maintenance activity. He stresses the importance of both dimensions of organisational activities:

By leadership, I mean influencing other’s actions in achieving desirable ends. Leaders are people who shape the goals, motivations, and actions of others. Frequently they negotiate change to reach existing and new goals...Leadership...takes...much ingenuity, energy and skill.

Managing is maintaining efficiently and effectively current organisational arrangements. While managing well often exhibits leadership skills, the overall function is toward maintenance rather than change. I prize both managing and leading and attach no special value to either since different settings and times call for varied responses. (Ibid, p.392)

In tandem with the above view, I believe that if schools are to become effective places of teaching and learning then the principal should be in the forefront of leading and managing. Bush (2007, p.391) found that in many parts of the world, including South Africa “there is recognition that schools require effective leaders and managers if they are to provide the best possible education for their learners.” Research (Sergiovanni, 2006; Southworth, 2005; Christie, 2010; Gorton & Alston, 2012) has shown that the principal’s role in the new

educational climate requires a balance between leadership and management. Therefore, the difference between leadership and management is based on the roles of each position. According to Burnham (cited in Morrison, 1998, p.205) leadership concerns “vision, strategy, creating direction and transformation of the organisation, whereas management is concerned with the practical action of leadership.” This overlap is often a matter of contention, quite understandably, since the two forms of action are so broadly conceptualised.

Kotter (2001, p.4) suggests that organisations need leader-managers: “people with strong leadership and management skills” however, he cautions that the challenge will be to balance the two in order to be effective. Grant (2010) argues that both the processes of leadership and management are crucial to successful schooling in democratic South African schools. However, she states that there should be a balance between the two. This is in line with the views of Davidoff and Lazarus (1997, p.36) that the ability to maintain the balance between “movement and stability, challenge and safety is the art of facilitating a school to do the right thing at the right time, while management is the discipline that is required to ensure that the school does things right.” Cunningham and Cordeira (2003) and Hallinger and Heck (2010) support the idea that effective leaders combine leadership with sound management practices. I therefore argue that a principal should have strong leadership and good management skills since both are imperative and inter-dependable for the smooth running of a school.

Traditionally leadership and management processes have been located within a single individual and have often been equated with headship (Grant, 2006). However, according to the Department of Education (1996, p.19) the tendency to regard school principals as “solely responsible for leadership and management is gradually being replaced by the understanding that leadership and management are the prerogative of many if not all, stakeholders in education.” In a study by van der Mescht and Tyala (2008, p.221) this is evident in a range of policy documents, ranging from “the South African Schools Act, 84 (1996) to the Draft Policy Framework: Education Leadership and Management Development (2006).” This school of thought tends to suggest that good leadership and management should permeate through and influence all aspects of an educational institution which in turn could have a positive impact in creating a favourable atmosphere for successful learning and teaching.

With the advent of transformation in South Africa, it is expected that a leader must have vision, but also competence as a manager who is proficient in the ability to ensure that most if

not all the ideals and objectives of a school are successfully achieved. In this study, exploring the school principals' understanding and experiences of their leadership entails a combination of leadership and management skills. Therefore, in this study these terms will be used interchangeably.

## **2.5 School Leadership**

School leadership is high on the education policy agendas in the hope to change and improve the education system and learner performance. According to Muijs (2011) this interest in school leadership is brought about by a number of factors often related to political changes to the education system.

These educational reforms globally, as well as in South Africa, are aligned to increased responsibilities and accountabilities for the principal in his or her individual role as well as for everyone working in schools (Fullan, 2001; Botha, 2004; Huber, 2004; Grobler, Bisschoff & Beeka, 2012). Thus, the perception of school leadership in this study is viewed as a democratic process involving shared responsibilities between principals and all stakeholders within the school who can play an important role in creating spaces where successful learning can occur (Bhengu & Gounder, 2014). Consequently, schools need strong leadership to achieve the set goals. Bolman and Deal (2003) posit that it is important for school managers to understand leadership from two perspectives. Firstly, leadership is a relationship between leaders, communities and concepts. While it is recognised that individual leaders can make a difference, nevertheless, consultation, shared decision making and transparency are important elements in the modern day running of the school. Secondly, school leadership is reciprocal as opposed to top-down influence for those in high positions. For that reason, I argue that the development of leadership at all levels is an important element for school improvement. Schools should be led by principals who coordinate the day to day functions to implement the vision and mission of their organisations.

An accumulating body of research shows that school leadership is pivotal to institutional effectiveness and is fundamental in establishing a platform for a learning environment (Spillane, 2003; Bush, 2008; Slater, 2008; Pashiardis & Brauckmann, 2009; Hallinger & Heck, 2010; Steyn, 2013; Bhengu & Gounder, 2014). The DoE (2004, p.9) maintains that effective school leadership attributes include facilitating the following:

- Crafting the vision and articulating how it should be realised
- Influencing and steering groups towards accomplishing goals
- Creating needed opportunities
- Directing and coordinating activities
- Inspiring a directive force of morale
- Creating conditions conducive for teamwork
- Inducing followers to behave in a desired manner

In addition, Steyn (2014) asserts that effective principals have a crucial influence on the culture of their schools which contributes to the way in which staff members interact professionally. The author states that it will promote successful school development, teamwork, collegiality, support and trust that are firmly embedded in democratic beliefs and values.

If principals are key to transforming schools into successful places of teaching and learning and improving educational standards then I support the view that principals should understand their leadership role. With this in mind I now explore the role of the principal to highlight the responsibilities captured in the ambit of school leadership.

### ***2.5.1 The Role of the Principal***

In the plethora of literature on school leadership there appears to be a common understanding of behaviours that underpin the principal's role. Most literature suggest that the principal is key to the success of an educational institution (Yukl, 2010; Huber & Muijs, 2010; Slater, 2008; Fullan, 2006; Bush, 2008; Hallinger, 2003; Sergiovanni, 2001; Rossow & Warner, 2000).

Today, in the context of rapid change the role of the principal is far more complex than before. The principal plays many essential roles in the operation of an effective school. Fullan (2007) suggests that the principal's role should be revised. He believes that by revising their roles, principals can become agents for school transformation. The author identifies the following pillars of successful leadership: moral purpose; improving relationships; understanding how change occurs; knowledge building and coherence-making. These skills would encourage a complete approach to sound



school leadership supporting collective ownership and responsibility of all stakeholders (Fullan, 2007). This makes school leadership a shared enterprise. Nevertheless, Nour and Yen's (cited in Burdett, 2003, p.179) finding cautions heads of institutions that "group decision making or shared enterprises in organisations requires increased levels of communication, coordination and collaboration; this demands hard work emotionally and intellectually."

The Department of Basic Education (2014), in line with other policy initiatives focuses primarily on the role of the principal as the leader with an emphasis placed on shared leadership. Cognisance is taken of the fact that good principals should not operate in isolation, but lead and manage their schools in accordance with values as encapsulated in the spirit of Ubuntu and Batho Pele. Furthermore, the DBE (2014, p.12) emphasises that the core purpose of principalship is "to provide leadership and management in all areas of the school to enable the creation and support of the conditions under which high quality teaching and learning takes place, which promotes the highest possible standards of learner achievements." I concur; whatever principals do from crafting a vision, setting goals, management of staff, school community partnership etcetera, must be in service of the learner (Rossow & Warner, 2000). For me, the principal's responsibility is to create a community of leaders in the school.

Scholars like Terry (1998) and Harris and Muijs (2005), explain that it is important that principals play an important role by empowering teachers to create an environment conducive for teaching and learning. This, the authors claim would lead to faculty empowerment and teacher leadership. In addition I believe, like the above scholars that this can be achieved if the principal's role is that of demonstrating empowerment principles, encouraging all attempts towards empowerment and recognising all empowerment successes. These collective effects of leadership make people feel valued and part of the action. Successful principals take advantage of teachers' expertise and create a community of shared leadership (Hargreaves, 1995). Furthermore, Di Paola and Walther-Thomas (2003, p.18) highlight the role of the principal as a "leader who promotes the success of all students by collaborating with families and community members and mobilising community resources." These

principals are not intimidated by the wisdom of others; instead they value it by distributing leadership (Hallinger, 2003; Harris & Spillane, 2008).

Moreover, looking at the guidelines as put forward by the DBE (2014) in the South African Standards for Principalship, the responsibilities of the principal are being shaped by an ever increasing body of regulations coming from the provincial and national governments. The education department continues to hold the principal accountable for implementing regulations and meeting expectations created at district level (Le Roux, 2012). Additionally, the effective functioning of a school greatly depends on the professional conduct of the school principal both as a leader with vision and as a manager who implements the school's mission (van Deventer & Kruger, 2003).

The principal is a vital cog in organising the school activities involving all stakeholders such as teachers, learners, parents and the community. Although traditionally the principal concentrated on the administrative functions in order for schools to work well (Sergiovanni, 2006; Hallinger, 2012), these scholars point out that in recent years more emphasis is being placed on what principals in schools are supposed to accomplish as a way of defining the job. However, they also state that much less attention is given to pointing out the processes that must be used. According to Sergiovanni (2006, p.6) principals are expected to do whatever is necessary to achieve the outcomes, because this has the advantage of "freeing principals and others with whom they work from bureaucratic restrictions and constraints."

The literature perused indicates that there has been a shift in what a principal does from being authoritarian to that of being a facilitator (Hallinger & Huber, 2012; Yukl, 2010; Sergiovanni, 2006; Southworth, 2005). Whilst their position may entail power and authority, modern day trends of this position gravitate more towards accountability. Maintaining quality in education largely depends on how the principal performs his or her leadership functions. The principal, as the leader of the school, should act as a facilitator and coordinate the efforts of the educators to accomplish the goals of the school (Trail, 2000).

The role of being a principal requires many personal qualities amongst others: motivation, will power, doggedness and initiative. The expectations of principals have moved from the demands of management and control to demands for an educational leader who can foster staff development, parent involvement, and community support and learner growth and to succeed with major changes and expectations (Conley, 2011; Risimati, 2001).

Sergiovanni (2006) expresses the view that school leaders should implement three important tasks in a school namely: coordinating and planning appropriate programmes; determining and guiding the development of objectives and policies; and acquiring and managing the necessary resources to support the planned programmes. Similarly, Hallinger and Heck (2010) see the principal as the single most important factor in school effectiveness. These scholars maintain that the principal is an influential leader and provides instructional leadership to all school stakeholders to create the environment conducive for continuous learning in the school and to accomplish the vision of the school. In addition, Fullan (2002) contends that the principal as leader of teaching should develop the teachers in terms of skills, professional community program coherence and technical resources. Furthermore, transformational leadership by a principal increased teacher efficacy (Fullan, 2002).

Leadership in South Africa, in the new dispensation, requires principals who are able to work in a democratic, participative and transformative style. Consequently it is imperative for school leaders to be able to reflect on their leadership styles and ensure that the leadership style which is being used accommodates the different situations in the school context. It is in this light that leadership scholars like Wynne and Guditus (1984) viewed leadership as being associated with the implementation of change and innovative ideas with the aim of achieving goals that serve the needs of the organisation and the individuals who are part of it. This understanding relates to leadership as being transformative through empowering others (Spillane, Halverson & Diamond, 2001). I agree, for me the principal must be the primary change agent who leads the school intellectually (Bhengu, 2005). The principal's role is "to cultivate the teachers' inner voice and to create a culture of continuous improvement by helping to define and breathe life into the structures of democratic governance" (Jackson & Davis, 2000, p.157).

However, Ibukun, Oyewole and Abe, (2011, p.248) caution that this list is by no means complete by any stretch of the imagination as it does not include the range of “stresses and conflicts associated with social interaction in the schools nor does it include the social and psychological conflicts resulting from cultural and personality differences in the school setting.” These scholars also contend that these limiting factors and restrictions tend to place significant boundaries on the degree of leadership effectiveness of school principals.

Reflecting on the above, for leadership to be effective, principals need to understand their role and be able to relate to the people they are working with and build solid relationships with them. The ability to lead also depends largely upon the aptitude to understand and address one’s own needs about the future and those of others in the organisation.

The democratic and participative relationship that is desired in schools by the education department suggest that all staff members should be party to decision-making, their advice should be sought and their opinion respected and valued as part of the trend towards distributive and collective decision-making. Fullan, (cited in Naicker & Mestry, 2013) contends that good leaders are those who develop leaders at other levels for the future of the system as a whole. For this type of leadership to emerge Campbell (1997); Hoyle (2001); Bush (2008); Pashiardis et al. (2009) and Ibrahim (2011) illuminate the importance of leaders to conduct themselves in a professional manner. This places high expectations on the ethical conduct of principals as to how they acquit themselves in their daily practices, be they formal or informal.

Ethics is an important element in the development of a professional code of conduct. In an article by Campbell (1997) on Ethical School Leadership, she suggests that educational leadership should also have ethical characteristics as part of its job description. She further asserts that principals must develop and articulate a much greater awareness of the ethical significance of their actions and decisions. Further to this Hodgkinson, (cited in Campbell, 1997, p.152) is of the opinion that “values, morals and ethics are the very stuff of leadership and administrative life” and thus recommends that school leaders and other aspiring administrators become aware of

this through introspection. Therefore, I believe, the role of principals as leaders is to act in a professional manner to develop their followers and bring about school change. Furthermore, I share the views of The South African Council for Educators (SACE) (2000) and Broadfoot, Osborn, Gilly and Paillet (1988) that successful change in teaching and learning will not be a reality if teachers' professional identity is not enhanced or developed. The realisation of these objectives will to a large extent depend on how well they understand and experience their roles as leaders. In the following section I look at how the context influences leadership experiences.

### ***2.5.2 Leadership and Context***

Schools are complex 'systems' which are not easy to change because they "interact with and are shaped by their context in ways that are complex and variable" (Christie, 2001, p.40). Concomitant with this thinking, I view the school context as an important aspect of my research because it would be the wide variations in the school contexts that would have a direct bearing on the principals' perceptions and experiences of their leadership.

Scholars like Leithwood and Riehl (2003) postulate that leadership functions can be carried out in many different ways, depending on the individual leader, the context and the nature of the goals being pursued. Hallinger, Bickman and Davis (1996) maintain that the school's environment offers both constraints and resources that shape the situation in which a principal will lead. Unquestionably a leader is greatly influenced by the environment in which she/he works. Therefore, leaders should be aware of the demands of their particular contexts. Hallinger and Heck (1996, p.14) for example, state that it is "practically futile to study principal leadership without reference to the school setting," whilst Leithwood, Jantzi and Steinbach (1999, p.4) contend that exceptional leadership is "exquisitely sensitive to the context in which it is exercised." In research studies on effective leadership, the importance of context is endorsed by principals as they repeatedly define their actions as leaders with reference to the needs of the learners, their home backgrounds and the social and economic environment of their communities (Christie, 1998; Coleman, 2003; Mulford, 2003). I

concur with this view that the context in which the principals work present different constraints, needs and opportunities.

Each school's context is different. Hallinger et al. (1996) contend that the features of the school, the community it serves, the principals' prior experiences and backgrounds create a context in which principals exercise leadership. Notwithstanding the fact that generally principals of primary, special and secondary schools have much in common, at the operational level there are considerable differences.

Schools are also shaped by national policies from central government more so as a result of schools having greater demands entrusted to them (National College for School Leadership, 2006). In comparison with some other school systems abroad, "South African schools are vastly unequal in terms of the human and financial resources" (Christie, 2010, p.702), therefore these added responsibilities impact hugely on the context under which principals exercise their leadership. As described by Christie (1998, p.284), the legacy of apartheid with its dysfunctional schooling system has "not simply disappeared with the replacement of the apartheid government with a new government." On the contrary, this legacy "continues to shape the character of current social behaviour in the country, including the performance of children in schools" (Soudien, 2007, p.183). Hence, context remains key to issues of leadership and school improvement in South Africa because deprivation persists in many disadvantaged communities and these "distinctive social conditions precede and accompany the child on his or her way to school" (Soudien, 2007, p.190). In light of this Grant (2010, p.243) states it is critical that any understanding of leadership from a South African viewpoint should be "flexible enough to accommodate these differing school settings."

According to the NCSL (2006) principals need to be able to read their context and that becoming contextually knowledgeable is an essential skill; one that has important consequences for leadership growth. This notion is echoed by Hallinger (2012) who suggests that principals must be able to understand the context first, and then develop suitable leadership strategies. In addition, "the ability to read your context correctly and adapt your leadership to the needs largely determines your success" (Ibid, p.137). This means employing a combination of school self-evaluation methods (IQMS,

South African context), and student outcome data to identify trends and the hard facts of the school's level of performance, progress and scale of improvements.

According to Leithwood, Day, Sammons, Harris and Hopkins (2006) there are some fundamental skills that leaders need to know and adopt and most good leaders rely on a similar range of practices. What is ultimately of importance is “not only what one does, but how it is done in any given situation and context” (NCSL, 2006, p. 6). Consequently, I am also of the view that there is no designated way to lead a school, those who lead should lead in an exemplary manner.

### ***2.5.3 Leadership Challenges facing Principals***

Globally school leadership in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is confronted with various demands and challenges (Mestry & Grobler, 2004,). South Africa is no exception. These scholars discuss various demands and challenges faced by principals reliant on the school contexts in which they work. These include among many other things: establishing a conducive environment for teaching and learning; the implementation of policies; the management of change; conflict and limited resources. These demands and challenges complicate the scope of the role of principals (Chikoko et.al, 2011).

Above and beyond, principals find themselves faced with inconsistent and conflicting expectations from their staff and communities, and they have to reconcile these expectations with reality (Pont, Nusche & Moorman, 2008). Besides, there are external factors that impact negatively on the principals' ability to run their schools effectively. These would include issues such as the complex range of tasks and additional stresses brought about by the changed education system and globalisation; the pace of change and demands of managing others in change and the need to be flexible and open to local conditions (Zimmerman, 2006; Pont et al., 2008; Bush, Kiggundu & Moorosi, 2011). Additionally, principals often face unbecoming behaviour and conduct from learners and teachers which often results in conflict. Msila (2012, p.1) states that “many principals lack the capacity to manage conflict which can be detrimental to organisational growth.” He states that conflict resolution is an important area that calls for professional development for principals. There are also problems of teachers' commitment, the quality of their training and the dynamic

cultures under which schools operate, which pose a threat to and create complications for the role of headship (Msila, 2012).

According to Drea and O'Brien (2002) the challenge for principals generally is to adapt their leadership style in accordance with the situation when dealing with fellow professional staff. However, a different style may be required in working with non-professional staff who in institutions such as special schools may outnumber the professional staff. These scholars maintain that the responsibility of ensuring the best service from such resources lies with the principal, but it may demand leadership skills quite different to those appropriate to teaching professionals. This may negatively impact on the principals' overall effectiveness. During these trying times, Fullan (cited in Bennett, Crawford & Cartwright, 2003) suggests that principals should be coaches and recognise that overall goals will not be achieved if these problems aren't worked through.

Scholars Risimati (2001), Bush (2008), Sergiovanni (2006), Hallinger and Heck (2010) state that there are seemingly growing demands from educational authorities, parents and all stakeholders that principals should be knowledgeable and effective to help with school improvement and building capacity. These scholars maintain that the principal must be well informed about current developments in the education sector since the context is forever changing. Furthermore, knowledge of technological integration in teaching and learning is also vital for the principal who wants to be relevant in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. These skills require a principal who is dynamic, versatile and flexible (Taole, 2013). Meeting such expectations cannot be achieved unless principals are prepared and developed for school leadership.

This begs the question; how do principals achieve this? To be effective and better understand their roles as leaders, I argue that principals need to be supported and developed.

#### ***2.5.4 Training and Development of Principals***

Being appointed to a particular post with a specific job description is not necessarily a valid indicator that the principal will spontaneously have the capacity to exercise



leadership within a specific context and time (Preedy et al., 2012). Hence, principals require new skills and competencies that could be fostered through training and development.

Ibrahim (2011) maintains that thorough development of principals will enable them to work within a framework to achieve the school and national goals in education. Research has shown that the developed countries have established programmes to prepare and grow principals for their tasks however, in the developing world very little has been done to prepare principals adequately (Ibrahim, 2011). In South Africa for example, one of the reasons given for poor matric results and a declining culture of teaching and learning is that principals are not appropriately skilled and trained to manage and lead their schools. Literature reveals that in South Africa many serving principals lack the necessary skills needed to implement and understand their leadership responsibilities (Mathibe, 2007; Bush et al., 2011; Msila, 2012).

To support principals in this regard efforts are being made by the Department of Education (DoE) in coming up with programmes to empower them for their tasks. The DoE has in tandem with all stakeholders and role players in education, developed the Advanced Certificate in Education School Leadership (ACE-SL) to continuously train and develop appointed school principals and those aspiring to become principals (DoE, 2006). It is envisaged that this course in leadership and school management will equip and capacitate them with the desired knowledge and skills to lead and manage their schools professionally. In addition Mestry and Grobler (2004) and Mestry and Singh (2007) underscore the need for the development and training of principals and suggest a competency based training model that allows principals to analyse, reflect and develop their practices. According to Marlow and Minehira (cited in Toale, 2013), school principals should have a range of skills in order to lead schools effectively towards the accomplishment of educational goals. Different competencies such as capacity building, vision building, team building, and conflict management required principals to cope with the changing demands of the education sector that have been suggested by researchers Msila and Mtshali (2011).

However, in concert with the views of Ibrahim (2011) I believe that these programmes should be ongoing and relevant to be effective. Additionally, principals

should be consulted on which content should be covered during the course since they are better able to discern the areas in which they need direction. This also indicates the importance of context in the preparation and development of principals because if they were to be trained on issues not predominant in their contexts then it would become very trying for them to relate that knowledge to effect school improvement.

Hence, there is no single best way to understand or guarantee good leadership. It is important to note that organisations and people are different and leaders or managers have the gruelling task of deciding what style or model of leadership is most suitable in each context (Steyn, 2011).

In the next section I discuss some leadership theories with the intention of exploring the possible influence they have on principals' understanding and experiences of leadership. The theoretical framework that underpins this study will be located within the broad discipline of educational leadership and in particular within the transformational leadership model.

## **2.6 Theories of Leadership**

My purpose in this research is to review or investigate the extent to which research on educational leadership approaches provide school leaders with useful guidelines to understand what they need to know and do as leaders to create opportunities for teaching and learning in their schools.

An important prerequisite for school efficiency is that school principals should understand leadership theories, styles and responsibilities. Scholars such as Sergiovanni (2001); Bush (2007); Leithwood, Jantzi and Steinbach (1999); Gorton and Alston (2012) and others describe the ways in which school principals could respond to daily challenges in their leadership tasks. These scholars maintain that an effective school is not categorised according to student achievement or any outcome measures of school performance, but rather how the school principal creates opportunities for effective teaching and learning and sustains healthy relationships with all stakeholders.

The above discussion suggests that there is no one size fits all leadership approach or style; provided that the style or approach resonates with the thinking and expectations of the

followers. I now review three different theoretical approaches to leadership, but pay particular attention to the transformational leadership theory which underpins this study.

### ***2.6.1 Situational Leadership Theory***

This approach is based on a model developed by Hersey and Blanchard (1996) which is built less around the person and more around the situation in which the person functions. The situational or contingent approach “recognises the diverse nature of school context and the advantage of adapting leadership styles to a particular situation, rather than adopting a one size fits all position” (Bush, 2007, p. 402). The nature of a particular situation is considered to be the most important variable determining how the leader functions. The situational leadership model was derived from contingency theory. This theory argues that there is no ideal leadership style; the best leader is the one who fits in the existing situation (Bush, 2007).

As believed by Grint (2011) situational leadership theory suggests that strong leadership needs a logical grasp of the situation and an apt response. The situational model assumes that there is no one best style of leadership or way to influence people. Rather, the style to be implemented will largely depend on how ready the people are to be inspired by the leader. The needs, maturity (readiness) and cohesiveness of the followers make a significant difference to the best style of leadership (Bush, 2007).

In keeping with the views expressed by Davidoff and Lazarus (1997) and Somech, (cited in Mokoena, 2011) the challenge is to develop the sensitivity and wisdom to use the right style of leadership at the right time. These scholars contend that at times one becomes directive, at times negotiating within a consultative framework and at times delegating control and responsibility to others in a supportive manner. Put differently, the principal or leader is expected to behave in a flexible manner in order for him or her to be able to determine the leadership style in accordance with the situation. This style of leadership allows followers to be comfortable with themselves, their colleagues and the circumstances. According to Yukl, (2011) this directive style assists followers to accomplish the goals by creating time lines, explaining roles and indicating how these goals are to be attained.

The success and effectiveness of the school is dependent on the appropriate action or style that the principal adopts in different situations. Thus, the success of a leader will largely be dependent upon his or her astuteness to respond adequately to any situation (Gorton & Alston, 2012).

My interest is to explore how principals combine their professional knowledge with their personal knowledge gained from their experiences in order to respond to new sets of circumstances and policy changes. The situational approach addresses this as principals do not have to adhere to set policy frameworks when they deal with new circumstances and ever-changing needs of their learners. What principals have to consider is what impact their decisions will have on their relationships with their staff in order to adopt an appropriate leadership style (Gorton & Alston, 2012). As stated earlier on, the principal's responsibilities have many dimensions. Therefore, it is important for the principal to adapt his or her leadership style to allow for participatory engagement by the whole school community (van der Westhuizen, 2002).

The context of the school will determine the characteristic of the leadership style. I concur with Hallinger and Heck (1996, p.14) that leadership is dependent on context and that it is “virtually meaningless to study principal leadership without reference to school context.”

Bush (2007) contends that in the South African context, with the most diverse education system in the world, it is folly to have a one size fits all approach to school leadership and management. I belong to the same school of thought that suggests it is better to equip principals with the necessary tools and wisdom to know which methods are required to manage. This helps school principals to deal with their daily leadership challenges in the new dispensation. I now move on to the instructional leadership approach.

### ***2.6.2 Instructional Leadership Theory***

Instructional leadership is a vital component in reforming education within the schooling environment. It is the motivating factor that inspires the principal to ensure

that effective schooling occurs. The deeper understanding of instructional leadership is the idea that the improvement of learning is paramount. Southworth (2002) states that not only is this approach strongly concerned with improving teaching and learning, but it also focuses on the professional development of teachers and student success. Buttressing the above claim Leithwood, Louis, Anderson and Wahlstrom (2004) state that principals directly and indirectly effect teaching and student achievement by particularly structuring teachers' working conditions. Bush and Glover (cited in Bush 2007, p.401) explained instructional leadership as follows:

Instructional leadership focuses on teaching and learning and on the behaviour of teachers in working with students. Leaders' influence is targeted at student learning via teachers. The emphasis is on the direction the direction and impact of influence rather than the influence process itself.

Simply, as an instructional leader, the principal needs to understand the basics of quality teaching and possess ample knowledge of the curriculum. According to Msila (2013), this line of thinking presupposes that the principal has the capacity to give valuable input to enhance instruction or is able to build an environment for teachers to give this support. Therefore, Botha (2004) asserts that instructional leaders are expected to set clear objectives, maintaining discipline and enforcing high standards, with the intention of improving teaching and learning at school. The principal must have his or her finger on the pulse in the teaching and learning process (Teddlie & Reynolds, 2002).

However, Bush (2003) cautions that although instructional leadership is an important element of the school's central activities, it should not underestimate other aspects of school life. I concur with this view since a holistically balanced approach in the principals' style of leadership can create an environment that would be conducive for learning for both teachers and learners.

For Fullan (2007) this model is a critical resource in the professional guidance and instructional direction of a school. This is because the focus is on effective teaching and learning and teacher development. Less time is then spent on administrative matters. According to him the attention of the instructional leader is to control, coordinate and supervise all teaching and learning activities.

Considering the fact that management and leadership are viewed as supporting roles in developing effective schools, principals cannot be effective instructional leaders if they are not good managers. The South African Task Team Report (1996, p.27) stressed that “management is important because it provides a supportive framework for teaching and learning.” The report highlights that management in education is not an end in itself, but its central aim is to promote effective teaching and learning.

Nevertheless, Bush (2007) states that although the above views are commendable, research shows that there is very little training and development done to prepare principals for instructional leadership. This statement is supported by Phillips (2012) that despite instructional leadership being effective for the success of schools, it is seldom practiced. He claims that only one tenth of a principal’s many tasks are geared towards instructional leadership. In a survey conducted by Bush and Heystek (2006) only 27, 2% of principals identified the central function of instructional leadership as a necessary exercise. These scholars posit that school principals are not fully grasping their responsibility as instructional leaders. Consequently, Bush (2007) maintains that school leaders need to understand that it is their responsibility to improve conditions for developing effective learning in their schools.

### ***2.6.3 Transformational Leadership Theory: Theoretical Framework***

The theoretical framework that underpins this study will be located within the broad discipline of educational leadership and in particular within the transformational leadership model.

The interest in transformational leadership was a reaction to the belief that the instructional model focused too much on the principal as the centre of expertise, power and authority in the school (Morris, 2014). In addition the control of authority was too heavy a burden for one person to carry alone. Hence, the move towards transformational leadership was regarded “as being more viable with a redistribution of power and responsibility, which encouraged greater interest in the empowerment of teachers and community members including shared leadership” (Morris, 2014, p.21). This study will adopt the transformational leadership as an appropriate model of

leadership because it motivates and inspires followers and in so doing can help to bring about desired change and organisational growth (Burns, 1978).

Likewise, Sergiovanni (2006) explains that transformational leadership is a type of leadership style based on influence which transforms followers positively by consensus, with the aim of building followers into leaders. By doing this, the followers are capacitated to such a degree that they are prepared to take risks (Singh & Lokotsch, 2005). Moreover, Leithwood, Jantzi and Steinbach (1999) posit that there is vast acknowledgement that leadership plays an indispensable role to advance and manage change and school growth.

In addition, literature suggests that if schools are to be transformed into learning organisations, school leaders must create shared visions, shared values and mental models for the development of schools and for assisting the teachers to become members of teams that would be learning through continuous dialogue. Sergiovanni (2006) purports that the principal who is transformational, does not rely on charm, but rather focuses on the distribution of leadership functions. This type of leadership allows for mutual and innovative problem solving discussion between the leader and follower such that it highlights the common values instead of personal gain (Lavery, 2011). According to Omar (2009) transformational leadership theory is a more all-encompassing approach to leadership and one that could be better applied to school leadership. I align myself with the views offered by Leithwood et al. (1999) that transformational leadership is seen to be sensitive to organisation building, developing shared vision, distributing leadership and building a school culture necessary to current restructuring efforts in schools. This form of consensual power which is manifested through other people instead of over other people is composed of three elements: (1) "it is a collaborative, shared decision-making approach, (2) it stresses teacher professionalism and empowerment, and (3) emphasises an understanding of change, including how to encourage change in others" (Gorton & Alston, 2012, p.17).

Leithwood and Jantzi (2006) stress the view that transformational leaders should have the following abilities: to see the overall picture necessary for continuing school progress, to foster a sense of collective ownership within the school community and to build teamwork.

If a leader is transformational, he or she is seen to be encouraging others to become transformational leaders so that the organisation is filled with effective leaders (Hay, 2006). Transformational leaders do not simply “manage structures and tasks, but focus on the people carrying out these tasks, that is on their relationships and on making deliberate efforts to win their co-operation and commitment” (Huber, 2004, p.672). I use these insights from the transformational leadership concept to explore the understanding and experiences of leadership especially in times where schools are undergoing changes in the education system.

#### *2.6.3.1 Transformational Leadership: Defining the Concept*

The concept was initially introduced by Burns (1978). According to him, it is a mutual agreement or process between leaders and followers to assist each other to become inspired to a higher degree of moral standards and motivation by displaying respect and encouraging participation. It is not merely an exchange of one thing for another, rather it brings about trust, integrity and true value. This theory is appealing since it generally results in an understanding of the different leadership styles and is a model to develop leadership. Burns (1978) initially drew a distinction between transformational and transactional leadership styles. He sees these styles as being at opposite ends of a continuum, with the leader having certain dispositions that govern their style. The author stresses that the transactional leader operates from a powerbase of rewards and punishments and attempts to gain the co-operation of followers on an exchange basis. Hence, very little personal commitment results from this exchange because it is dependent on the understanding and accomplishment of given tasks. This type of leadership is viewed as a function of organisational position and is concerned with getting people to respond to challenges and tasks to achieve envisaged aims (Ubben, Hughes & Norris, 2001).

King (1994) suggests that the transformational leader’s style is to be innovative in transformational ways, whereas the transactional leader concentrates mainly on policymaking and planning.



For Burns (1978), the transforming approach changes the followers' expectations, aspirations, values and perceptions. Leithwood and Jantzi (2006) state that this approach focuses on the leaders' character and ability to inspire the followers to have a paradigm shift in their attitudes. It is unlike the transactional approach where there is a 'bargaining' or 'reward' relationship. Covey (1991) states that transformational leadership offers the framework within which power exchanges in institutions take place. Bass and Avolio (1994) advocate that organisations should be more transformational than transactional in character.

Later Bass (1985) expanded upon Burns' (1978) original ideas and coined the term transformational leadership. Transformational leadership is about empowering followers to become leaders through the establishment of a reciprocal bond of trust and inspiration. Bass (1985) argues that a transformational leader displays charisma, considers the interests of individuals and stimulates their intellectual abilities. Both Bass and Burns agree that productive leaders who concentrate on transformation make a greater impact on followers. For Bass (1999) the core of transformational leadership theories is that leaders transform their followers through their encouraging nature and charming personalities. These qualities are appealing to the followers because they are associated with the leader. However, Bass (1998, p. xxxvii) theorises that "such leaders may be charismatic, but they also need to know how to provide intellectual stimulation and individualised consideration to followers."

According to Leithwood et al. (2006) transformational leadership is based on influence and yields its successes when principals are prepared to distribute power and authority to their followers in order for the followers to exercise their potential to the fullest. This would lead to the accomplishments of goals set. Bass (1998) identified three ways in which leaders transform followers: by increasing their awareness of the importance and value of their duties; by getting them to focus first on organisational goals rather than their own interests, and stimulating their higher-order needs. Thus, the main objective of transforming leadership is to transform self-interest into shared concerns and

targets (McCleskey, 2014). In addition, Leithwood et al. (2006) state that transformational leadership is based on three fundamental goals which drive the pursuit of a successful educational environment. These fundamental goals are:

1. Helping staff members develop and maintain a collaborative professional school culture;
2. Fostering teacher professionalism and empowerment, and
3. Helping them to solve problems together more effectively (p.23).

The above features assume that transformational leadership plays a significant role in encouraging teacher leadership. This can be achieved by fostering a strong relationship with the staff, having a clearly articulated vision of the school and being well equipped with strong motivational skills. Teacher leadership displays values of transformational leadership. According to Pounder (2006) it nurtures a greater sense of teaching and collaboration which provides teachers with a sense of belonging and empowering them for school development. Nnane (2009) posits that transformational leadership and teacher leadership have some commonalities, doing things in pursuing excellence through a collective and a collaborative action in which members act beyond expectations.

The literature suggests that transformational leadership could be viewed as distributive because it focuses on the development of a shared vision and commitment to school change. This implies that experiences of leadership in this study can be 'stretched over' school leaders other than the principal. It is for this reason that scholars like Spillane, Halverson and Diamond (2001) consider distributed leadership to be an extension of transformational leadership because of its ability to empower others. Castanheira and Costa (cited in Balyer, 2012 p.582) describes three basic functions of transformational leadership. Firstly, these leaders serve the needs of others, by empowering and inspiring followers to achieve great success. Secondly, transformational leaders charismatically lead, set a vision, and instil trust, confidence and pride in working with their followers. Lastly, if followers are

intellectually exposed to similar situations to which the leaders were exposed, then the followers acquire the same level of leadership. The author suggests that in this model the school becomes its own change agent and is less bureaucratic. Thus, the whole school becomes empowered as a collective instead of a few individuals. It can also be said that transformational leadership has strong moral underpinnings as it raises conduct, ethical aspirations, resources and capacities of all participants.

For Bass and Riggio (2006) all the above transformational characteristics fall into four interrelated components. In their relationships with followers, this theory posits that transformational leaders display each of these four components to varying degrees in order to bring about desired organisational outcomes through their followers:

1. Idealised influence. This is defined as considering the needs of others before their own personal needs. Avoiding the use of power for personal gain. Demonstrating high moral standards and setting challenging goals for followers.
2. Inspirational motivation. This factor describes the ways by which leaders motivate and inspire those around them, including practices aimed at creating attractive visions of future states, boosting follower goals, and inspiring enthusiasm and optimism.
3. Intellectual stimulation. This process is aimed at developing followers' capacities to higher levels and the practices of this process stimulate effort to become more innovative and creative.
4. Individualised consideration. The dimension implies paying close attention to the needs and interests of the followers to develop their potential. (Ibid, 2006, p.6).

In addition, Yukl (2005) believes that leadership should be seen as a reciprocal process between leaders and followers to sway the conduct of others to achieve organisational goals by inspiring them at school.

I agree with Balyer (2012) that in order to make any organisation a better performing place, principals' transformational behaviours become imperative

more so at schools, as they are the dynamics of change for the communities which they serve. Transformational leadership for me, does not expect immediate results, instead it seeks for potential in followers and seeks to develop and stimulate the follower holistically (Muijs, 2011).

Another important point raised in the literature is the ethical responsibility of transformational leadership.

#### *2.6.3.2 Ethical Responsibilities of Transformational Leadership*

Foster (in Ubben et al. 2001, p.16) suggests that transformational leaders function from four important characteristics:

Firstly, they are informative. Transformational leaders assist in the learning process in the organisation. Secondly, they are critical. They help staff examine current conditions and question their appropriateness for all individuals. Thirdly, transformational leaders are principled. They encourage self-reflection, democratic values and moral relationships. They strive to influence people to higher levels of values consciousness. Lastly, they are transformative. Their aim is to bring about change through empowerment by building a community of individuals who can make a difference.

To sum up I believe, like Bass (1999), that if an individual is to be transformational within the principalship role, he or she must have in place a foundation of good leadership and management practices to do so. In addition, principals should display character traits consistent with those of transformational leadership in order to operate in a transformational environment.

However, the question that needs to be asked in this study is how do principals understand their leadership roles in relation to transformational leadership theory and how does this in turn influence their experiences of leadership?

## **2.7 Conclusion**

The literature reveals that leadership has evolved from being traditional autocratic and bureaucratic to the contemporary participative, collaborative and transformational style in which all members of the school are involved. The role of the principal has become a leadership/management role with a variety of facets and demands.

Therefore, in order to meet the challenges of this century the school principal's role should be to develop approaches to leadership which will generate an open school climate and team spirit to assist teachers to assume leadership roles with greater confidence. The literature shows that the aim of leadership in schools is to engage everyone in the school in the process of empowered development, enhancing their capacity to improve the learning and teaching process. It is no secret that strong and effective school leadership can assist with ongoing school improvement by providing direction, capacity building, teacher development, conflict management and effective communication. Improving the quality of education will succeed if school principals adopt transformational leadership which takes capacity building beyond one's self interest (Bass, 1998).

The next chapter focuses on the research methodology.

## CHAPTER THREE

### RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

#### 3.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to present a detailed description of how the study was conducted. It focuses on the research design and methodology that enabled me to answer my research questions. The explanation of data collection and analysis procedures follows and the chapter concludes with the limitations of the study.

#### 3.2 Research Design

##### *3.2.1 Working within the Interpretive Paradigm*

To understand how principals interpret and experience leadership in their schools, I made use of a qualitative research framework, in particular an interpretive approach. This approach provides relevant information about the subjective reasons and meanings that lie behind social action (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999). It is most suitable because it seeks to understand social members' definition and understanding of situations (Henning, van Rensburg & Smit, 2004).

This implies that the aim of the interpretive paradigm offers an understanding of a situation, to analyse it and to give an understanding of how people make sense of their situation or phenomenon (Maree, 2007).

The interpretive paradigm does not concern itself with discovering all the rules and laws of the social world, but rather attempts to understand social life and learn how people construct meaning in their natural setting (Neuman, 2006). Interpretivists believe that it is possible to understand how people make sense of the contexts in which they live and work. Thus it can be argued that people's behaviour is reliant on their context and much can be learned from how they make sense of the environment in which they work. This is in line with the focus of this research, as its purpose is to gain a deeper understanding of the individual principals' interpretation of leadership

in the contexts in which they live and work. I interviewed three principals from different social backgrounds and contexts. It was only through direct contact with the principals concerned that I was able to explore their experiences and perceptions of leadership. I was able to communicate with them and gather some understanding of their world. Soudien (in Omar 2009, p.81) states that life experiences are embedded in memory therefore “the principals’ constructions of reality via their memory can be used to explore experiences of leadership.” Seidman (1998, p.126) maintains that “because people are all different and have their own perceptions and interpretations, there are multiple truths; knowledge is subjectively created and inter- subjectively negotiated.” This is consistent with the view of Terre Blanche and Durrheim (1999, p.398) that the interpretive paradigm is more concerned with “making sense of human experience from within the context and perspective of human experience.”

Because it would be difficult to separate the phenomenon under study from the context of the specific schools, a qualitative case study within the interpretive paradigm was chosen as research design.

### ***3.2.2 Locating the Research as a Qualitative Study***

A qualitative case study within the interpretive paradigm was adopted as a research design in order to gain a deeper understanding of the principals’ perceptions and experiences of leadership.

According to Merriam (1998) qualitative research seeks to explain and understand social phenomena within their natural setting. Qualitative researchers always attempt to study human action from the insider’s perspective, since the aim of research is on describing and understanding, rather than the explanation and prediction of human behaviour (Babbie & Mouton, 2006). This resonates with the views of Henning et al. (2004, p.3) that the qualitative approach is not only about “what happens, but also how it happens and why it happens the way it does.”

Additionally, qualitative researchers are interested in the ways different people make sense of their lives. Bruner (1990) asserts that qualitative enquiry forces both the researcher and the researched to see themselves in a new way. At the heart of

qualitative enquiry is a quest to understand what is behind people's beliefs and motives.

Since I was the primary instrument for data generation and analysis this approach was ideal because by asking 'what', 'why' and 'how' questions I could get a better understanding of the experiences, values, actions and beliefs of the respondents. One of the greatest strengths of the qualitative approach, is "its richness and depth of explorations and descriptions it yields" (Maree, 2007, p.51). Similarly, Henning et al. (2004) state that the most distinguishing factor in qualitative research is the 'thick descriptions'.

The following features of using the qualitative approach as identified by Maree (2007, pp.50-51) further emphasise why this method was appropriate for my research. The qualitative approach makes a concerted effort to collect rich data relating to a specific occurrence in a particular situation. It is predominantly interested in understanding the processes and the social and customary circumstances which form the basis for diverse patterns of behaviour. Moreover, the main focus was on exploring the "why" research question. In addition, qualitative research needs to take place in the participants' real world setting with the intention being to describe and develop an understanding of the meanings shared by the participant, with a caution that researchers must not attempt to change the contexts to suit their own means. Unlike quantitative research, qualitative research is associated with depth rather than width. A key indicator of qualitative research is the deep and meaningful data that is reflected.

As a qualitative researcher I sought to understand the explanation of meaning people have constructed, in other words, how they make sense of their world and the experiences they have in the world (Merriam, 2001). Since this research was aimed at exploring the principals' understanding and experiences of their leadership, it was only through direct contact with them (the principals) during the interview sessions that I was able to explore their perceptions and experiences by asking probing questions. This is in line with the argument of Babbie and Mouton (1998, p.272), that "if one understands events against the background of the whole context and how such



context confers meaning to the events concerned, that one can truly claim to understand the events.”

The principals who were interviewed came from different social, political, cultural and economic backgrounds and they attached different meanings to various organisational issues. For example, whilst the principals all had a common purpose of educating children, they all started their teaching careers under different education departments in the old dispensation. One taught under the House of Assembly which catered for White pupils only, whose schools were well resourced; the other participant taught under the House of Delegates which catered for Indian pupils and the last participant started under the Department of Education and Training catering for Black pupils under the jurisdiction of White governance.

The qualitative research method therefore allowed me to be subjective in my approach since I was dealing with human behaviour, which includes beliefs, interests and perceptions. This allowed for thick descriptions of actual life experiences applicable to the daily activities of the principals. All the above features of qualitative design contributed to the choice of case studies within this methodology.

### ***3.2.3 Case Study Research***

The research was designed in the form of case studies as this allowed me an insight into the real dynamics of the participants’ world. The unit of analysis is the principals’ understanding and experiences of leadership.

In addition, I regard research that explores personal and individual experiences in education as an important aspect of learning about the needs of those in leadership. The qualitative research approach has been used by researchers to examine real life situations. At this point I would like to define what constitutes a case study.

Case study, as many authors have pointed out (Merriam, 2001; Yin, 1994; Simons, 2009 and Rule & John, 2011) has different meanings for different people in different disciplines. For example, Rule and John (2011, p.4) define a case study as a “systematic and in-depth investigation of a particular instance in its context in order to generate knowledge.” I align myself with this definition. I found a case study

approach relevant for this research because it afforded me the opportunity to arrive at a rational conclusion by examining the principals' understanding and experiences of leadership, to thoroughly understand it from different perspectives. Similar sentiments are expressed by Simons (2009) that a case study is a comprehensive investigation, from various points of view, of the intricacies and distinctiveness of a specific concept, approach, course of study or structure in a real life situation. Lindegger (1999, p.255) believes that case studies are "intensive investigations of particular individuals, usually descriptive in nature and provide rich information about individuals or particular situations."

From the above definitions of case studies one gathers that there are differences in the terminology describing case studies. However, they all concur that the study of human relations can yield greater understanding and appreciation of the uniqueness of the life being investigated. This is because people are entwined within the context of the phenomenon being researched.

For Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2007, p.253) a case study is: "a bounded system which provides a unique example of real people in real situations, enabling readers to understand ideas more clearly than simply by presenting them with abstract theories or principles." These scholars opine that it is important in case studies for events and situations to be allowed to speak for themselves, rather than to be largely interpreted, evaluated or judged by the researcher (Cohen et al., 2007). It is therefore for this reason that I allowed the data to 'speak' to each other with limited interference. This study thus looked at the phenomena of leadership in real life contexts by using in-depth interviews and reflective journal writing to obtain rich data.

Critics of the case study approach claim that case study research is dependent on a single case and is incapable of providing a generalising conclusion (Maree, 2007). Contrary to this perception, the proponents of this method maintain that this is not the purpose of case study research; rather the aim is to gain deeper knowledge and understanding of the dynamics of a specific situation. Hamel (cited in Maree, 2007) describes this singularity as a focus of the global in the local. This is what I envisaged achieving in this research, as the intention was not to arrive at generalisations but "to

gain the persuasive voices of the respondents as it is studied in its natural setting” (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994, p.3).

Because I selected three cases to explore the principals’ understanding and experiences of leadership, the study could not be considered without the context, namely the school environment. It is within the context of the school where they developed and experienced their leadership and professional skills. Therefore, it would have been impossible to have a true picture of their perception of their leadership roles without considering the context within which it occurred. These case studies were also interpretive in that they served to elicit deep-seated feelings from the principals. In addition, they dealt with an in-depth investigation of the principals’ leadership experiences within their particular working contexts. My investigation allowed the principals to describe through their own experiences how they created spaces for teaching and learning. It also allowed me to gain greater insight into the differing perspectives of their leadership experiences.

Merriam (1998) states that although some researchers focus on the process of the research, some on the unit of analysis, others at the end product, she explains that the case study is defined by the interest in the individual case and not by the methodologies of inquiry. In this study the case was the school principals.

I made use of Merriam’s (1998) characterisations of particularistic, descriptive and heuristic, as a guide. It was particularistic since the focus was on the principals’ understanding and experiences of their leadership roles. Particularistic means that case studies focus on a particular situation, event, program or phenomenon. The case itself is “important for what it might represent” (Merriam, 1998, p.29). It is descriptive because the final report “is a rich, thick description of the phenomenon under study” (Ibid, 1998, p.24). It is heuristic in that it “illuminates the reader’s understanding of the phenomenon under study which can bring about the discovery of new meaning, extend the reader’s experience, or confirm what is known” (Merriam, 1998, p.30).

In accordance with the above approach, this study aimed to explore how these principals understood and experienced leadership within their specific contexts. The three principals gave a rich description of how they experienced their leadership roles within their particular contexts. These principals are leading schools in communities

with different socio-economic backgrounds, located in different circumstances. This results in different experiences regarding their roles and responsibilities as professional leaders. However, it is worth mentioning that the data collected showed both similarities and differences with regard to their experiences.

### **3.3 Research Methodology**

Scholars Cohen et al. (2007) and Rule and John (2011) assert that there is a clear distinction between the terms method and methodology. For Rule and John (2011) the term methodology refers to the manner in which the research is designed and conducted. In this study, the methodology that I used was case study research. The term method is described by Cohen et al. (2007, p.47) as “the techniques and procedures in the process of data-gathering.” Therefore, I used in-depth interviews with a biographical section and the writing of a guided reflective report.

#### ***3.3.1 Sampling***

The selection of principals was done through purposive sampling because I wanted access to people who had in-depth knowledge and experience about leadership. They were targeted because of the above features as they could shed optimal light on the issues of the study. This is in line with the suggestion of Rule and John (2011, p.64) that participants should be “purposely chosen because of their fitness in advancing the purpose of the research.”

Patton (1990) describes purposeful sampling as the process of choosing information - rich cases for in-depth study. I was interested in the principals’ ability to generate data which allowed for a full, in-depth and reliable story. These participants were selected because of the knowledge and information they had regarding the perception and experiences of leadership. The criterion used for this purposive sampling was to choose participants who have been principals for more than three years in their current schools. Apart from that, they were chosen because they are recognised for their interest and knowledge of current educational research (the three principals were enrolled for a school leadership and management course at the University of

KwaZulu-Natal at the time of this study) and their ongoing involvement in school improvement strategies that have been demonstrated in local print media.

The sampling was done as follows:

- The participants, either male or female, required at least three years' experience in principalship.
- The participants were purposefully selected to reflect an urban, semi-urban and rural setting respectively.

According to Cohen et al. (2007, p.114) in purposive sampling "researchers handpicked the cases to be included in the sample that is satisfactory to their specific need." Therefore, the three principals in this study were purposively selected because of their knowledge, experience and perceptions of leadership and were able to shed more light on the topic. The participants were two female principals and one male principal. I wish to indicate to the reader that the focus of my study was not on gender issues, but rather on the participants' experiences and understanding of leadership within their particular ambit. However, I take cognisance of the fact that there could be differences in the manner in which the principals experience their leadership roles given the historical marginalisation of women in education. This was a small sample because I thought the data generated from them would be sufficient for my study. Merriam (2001, p.64) states that "the size of the sample does not matter, what matters are an adequate number of participants to answer the questions posed." This is akin to Patton's (2002, p.230) claim that "qualitative inquiry typically focuses in-depth on relatively small samples, even single cases, selected purposefully."

For me, the primary concern was to attain a specific type of information from those who are in a position to give it, and therefore the intention was not to generalise the results of the data beyond this group.

All participation was strictly voluntary and I obtained consent from each principal. They were also given an opportunity to respond by contacting me or my supervisor with any queries or reservations they had regarding the research process.

### ***3.3.2 The Identity of Participants***

To ensure anonymity and confidentiality I used pseudonyms to hide the identity of the participants and their respective schools. The principals and their respective schools were named as follows:

- Principal Kate: Principal of Rainville Primary School
- Principal Ben: Principal of Dewdrop Combined School
- Principal Clare: Principal of Sunshine Special School

### ***3.3.3 Permission to Conduct Research***

Prior to the commencement of my research, I obtained permission from the Department of Education to conduct research with the principals from three schools within the Umgungundlovu District (Appendix II).

Once permission was granted, I contacted the potential participants telephonically outlining the purpose of the research and to get their consent. I then made a preliminary visit to their schools, outside teaching hours, to further clarify my research plan and explained that the participants would need to avail themselves for in-depth interviews with a biographical section (Appendix IV) and they were also asked to write a reflective journal (Appendix V) around the same topic. During this period I gave a letter of consent to the participants (Appendix III) and provided them with copies of my authorisation, granted by the Department of Education and the University of KwaZulu–Natal (Appendix I) to conduct the interviews. It is interesting to note that I did not experience any problems relating to the appointments I made with principals.

All participation was strictly voluntary, and I obtained informed consent from each participant stating that they were willing to participate in the research, and agreeing that the interviews would be recorded on audiotape. This is in line with the suggestions of Cohen et al. (2007) that before embarking on any research, access to the institution where the research is going to be conducted and acceptance from the participants, whose permission is needed to do the research, should first be sought. This exemplifies good ethical practice.

To ensure that all participants were fully informed before agreeing to participate, I offered them the option to follow up this letter by contacting me, or my thesis supervisor with any concerns or queries they had regarding the research process. The assurance was also given that findings and recommendations of the study would be made available to the participants and that they would be asked to verify whether the deductions were a true reflection. In addition all participants were assured before the research commenced that their identities would remain confidential and anonymous.

### **3.4 Methods of Data Generation**

The researcher made use of the following data generation methods, namely in-depth interviews and the writing of a guided reflective report with a biographical section. The first method was individual in-depth interviews. The second method was documentation in the form of reflective journal writing. Here the participants were asked to reflect on their feelings and experiences as leaders. The objective was to increase the volume of the data available to me, which was useful for triangulation purposes and ultimately served to enhance the trustworthiness of my findings.

#### ***3.4.1 The Interview as Data Generation Instrument***

A qualitative research methodology consisting of in-depth interviews with open-ended questions was used as a primary strategy for generating data. This was the primary strategy to gather data from the three school principals. The purpose was to gain an in-depth understanding of the participants' experience of their leadership roles within their specific contexts. Simply, it was to find out "what is in somebody else's mind and not to put things there," (Ribbons, in Briggs & Coleman, 2009, p.208).

One of the key features of in-depth interviews is that it combines structure with flexibility permitting the topic or issue to be covered more suitably for interviewing, (Legard & Ward, in Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). Additionally, "the structure is sufficiently flexible to allow responses to be fully probed and explored and allows the researcher to be responsive to relevant issues raised spontaneously by the respondent" (Ibid, p.154).

Consequently, it allowed the researcher to establish how the participants created learning environments which open up opportunities for learner success. I was particularly interested in each participant's concerns, interpretations and unique context in which he or she practised school leadership. This technique was appropriate for the purpose of my research questions since it was focused and discursive and allowed the researcher and participant to explore an issue (De Vos, Strydom, Fouché & Delport, 2005). It involved direct personal contact with the participants who were asked to respond to questions relating to the research problem. Besides, it was a flexible tool which allowed me to adapt to each individual as the interview progressed. This was done by probing into the initial responses to clarify views and it also allowed the participants to express themselves openly and freely. In this way the participants' own voices were able to come through and be heard. The open-ended questions allowed me to collect evidence comprehensively and methodically in a format that would be thematic so that similar themes and patterns could be exposed.

The main reason for using interviews was to see the world through the eyes of the principals in this study. Interviews, as Henning et al. (2004) state are unrestrained actions aimed at finding what participants think, know and feel. Interviews are data production strategies conducted by the researcher with the participant to move beyond the surface talk to a rich discussion of thoughts and feelings. It is a principle means of gathering information "having direct bearing on the research question" (Cohen et al., 2007, p.351).

The interview relies on the fact that people are able to give information regarding their practices, actions or experiences to the interviewer. The interaction with the principals allowed the researcher an opportunity to get to know and understand the world from their point of view and to unfold the meaning of their experience (Kvale, 1996). In addition, Hutchinson (1990, p.125) explains that interviews permit researchers to "verify, clarify or alter what they thought happened in order to gain a full understanding of an incident and to take into account 'lived' experiences of participants." For Patton (1987, p.102) the strength of the interview is that it becomes "highly responsive to individual differences and situational changes, but its weakness is that it necessitates a great deal of time to get orderly information."



Qualitative methods such as in-depth interviews for data generation are predominant in the interpretive paradigm. De Vos et al. (2005) state that elements of phenomenology present themselves in a study like this where the intention is to explore and describe the various ways in which the principals interpret the essence of their experiences as professional leaders. This is in line with the view of Henning et al. (2004, p.37) that “the phenomenological researcher believes that the participants can give their experience best when asked to do so in their own words, in individual reflective interviews and in observing the context in which some of this experience has been played out.” Because the researcher is also fully involved as an instrument of data collection, Marshall and Rossman, (1995, p.59) contend that the “I was there” element in the portrayal of the picture of the phenomenon being studied is part of the design. They further state that:

The researcher’s presence in the lives of the participants invited to be part of the study is fundamental to the paradigm. Whether that presence is sustained and intensive as in ethnographics, or whether relatively brief, but personal, as in in-depth interviews studies, the researcher enters into the lives of the participants (Ibid, 1995, p.59).

However, De Vos et al. (2005) caution that one must be mindful of maintaining a balance between flexibility and consistency when using this technique in data collection. According to them, flexibility is important to allow the participants to relate their stories to collect data, and consistency needed to allow for depth and detail. This is essential for comparative purposes. The primary advantage of in-depth, semi-structured interviews is that not only do they provide more detailed information than other data collection methods, such as surveys, but they also provide a more relaxed atmosphere in which to collect information (Boyce & Neale, 2006).

I piloted the in-depth interview schedule to refine and to validate it because it was my primary means of data generation. I chose to pilot the study with a principal who had retired recently and was willing to assist with the piloting of the interview schedule. This exercise proved to be useful as it assisted me to make some modifications to the questions that were asked in the interview schedule.

### *3.4.1.1 Conducting the Interviews*

Appointments were made with each individual participant at a time that was convenient for both parties where they were informed about the purpose of the study, probable duration of the interview as well as choice of venues. At this briefing session two possible dates were set for the interviews in view of the fact that principals face many unforeseeable circumstances on a daily basis which might necessitate cancellation of meetings. The second date served as a “rain check” in the event that the first interview date needed to be postponed (Carreau, 2008).

Interviewees chose the date, time and place for the interviews. Two participants chose to do the interviews at their schools after school hours so as to not interfere with the academic or extracurricular programmes of the school. The third participant chose to be interviewed in the researcher’s office during the school holidays. I also provided the participants with the interview schedule at this briefing session so that they could have an opportunity to think about their responses. The objective was to assist the researcher with well thought out, authentic responses that were not prompted by the demands of the interview or by the thought that particular responses were desired (Opie, 2004). According to Lincoln and Guba (1985) participants should be briefed with respect to the nature and purpose of the interview as part of the informed consent procedures.

Furthermore, Merriam (1998, p.23) states that certain important points should be considered when conducting an interview. For example one should create a relaxed atmosphere that would be conducive to achieving the set goals. Therefore, at the beginning of the interview I introduced myself and explained the purpose of the interview. The participants were assured that their identity and any information that they provided would be treated confidentially and anonymously. During this time I was brief and did not give too much information that could possibly influence their views and lead to bias on their part. The participants were thanked for availing themselves to assist the researcher in generating the data needed. The interview was held in a relaxed

and conversational manner that created an atmosphere of trust in which the participants felt comfortable to express their experiences and feelings freely.

Although each interview was allocated a time of more or less forty-five minutes, all of the interviews went beyond the allocated time. The participants answered beyond the allocated time, drawing on their vast experiences and enthusiasm to answer the questions as comprehensively as possible. The researcher allowed this in an attempt to gain more useful data around the topic and also to allow the natural flow of interaction.

The researcher designed an interview guide (Appendix IV) that was used to guide the process, but not to restrict responses from the participants. The questions which pertained to the biographical and historical aspect of the interview schedule allowed the researcher to obtain a fairly good understanding of each participant. During the interview, the researcher decided on how to phrase questions, when to ask which questions and when to probe. The participants were also encouraged to raise issues during the interviews, which is in line with the suggestion of Henning et al. (2004) of a two way communication. This created functional space where the participant (interviewee) was not reminded too much of the fact that he or she was being 'tested', but rather contributing insight to the phenomenon under study (Henning et al., 2004). Probing is common in semi-structured interviews because it clarifies unclear questions to the interviewee and also in-depth information about the subject is available (Best & Khan, 1986). The researcher was also careful during this process not to make value judgements, but rather to fathom the perceptions and experiences of the principals. These conversations were very interesting for both the participant and researcher and were perceived as a learning experience.

During the interviews the researcher also made some field notes. These notes were helpful to remember and explore the process of the interviews because it was a written account of what I observed, heard, experienced and thought during the process of interviewing. Moreover, it captured data such as body

language and facial expressions of the participants during interviewing which could not be captured by the tape-recorder.

According to Josselson (cited in Collins, 1998, p.8) the “events recounted and experiences described are more substantial, more real, through being recorded and written down.” Therefore, a good quality digital voice recorder was used to record all interviews. Permission to record interviews was obtained from the participants before the interview session. The recordings were then transcribed verbatim and the results were analysed.

### ***3.4.2 Reflective Journal Writing***

The writing of a guided reflective report was my second data-generating instrument (Appendix V). This was done to corroborate the in-depth interview transcripts. The reflective reports were hand delivered to the participants during a pre-interview meeting, so that the participants could complete them in their own time, and be able to submit them when I returned to do the interviews on the dates chosen by them. This was a time-saving strategy so as not to inconvenience the participants at an inopportune time.

The three principals were asked to reflect and write on any two incidents that they experienced during the past year. They had to reflect particularly on one where the interaction between them and staff members, pupils or the community evoked a pleasant experience and the other reflection had to be an incident where there were differences of opinion between the principal and staff member/s or the School Governing Body. The principals were then requested to narrate their feelings and experiences during this time in writing and to explain how they would either go about improving on what they had achieved or how they would approach it differently should such an incident recur. The objective was to get more in-depth information on the experiences of their leadership in their respective schools that were of such a nature that the participants would not volunteer during an interview. The information in the reflective journals was used to cross-check information in the interview transcripts.

According to Barth (2001) writing about our experiences in schools is one way to ensure that we reflect on and learn from our experiences. Reflective writing provided an opportunity for the participants to practise critical analysis and reasoning about their practice. It served as a tool for self-reflection and thus deepened their leadership practice. The intention here was that the use of reflective writing would serve to capture the principals' own understanding and experiences of leadership in their respective schools.

### **3.5 Data Analysis**

My data analysis was an ongoing process and started concurrently with data collection. Good data analysis, according to Patton (2002, p.432) is the process of transforming data into findings and it “involves reducing the amount of raw information, sifting trivia from significance, identifying significant patterns and constructing a framework for communicating the essence of what the data reveal.” In short, the researcher is making sense of data in terms of the “participant’s definitions of the situation noting patterns, themes, categories and regularities” (Cohen et al., 2007, p.461). However, these authors also state that there is no one way of analysing data, it must abide by the rule of “fitness for purpose” (Ibid, 2007, p.461). This is similar to Patton’s (1990, p.372) view that there are no set rules for analysing data, there are only guidelines: “there are no absolute rules except to do the very best with your full intellect to fairly represent the data and communicate what the data reveals given the purpose of the study.”

Because this study is qualitative and interpretive in nature the aim of the analysis process was to explore how the participants make meaning of a specific phenomenon such as leadership by analysing their understanding and experiences thereof. Therefore, in order to facilitate analysis of the data all recorded interviews were listened to repeatedly after each interview. These recorded interviews were then transcribed and typed verbatim by the researcher. This process forced me to become familiar with the data in more than one way. Transcribing the interviews and reading through the reflective journal writing enabled me to immerse myself in the data as a whole (De Vos et al., 2005). This is in line with the views of Terre Blanche and Kelly (1999) and De Vos et al. (2005) that data analysis involves reading through your

transcripts repeatedly by immersing yourself in the details, to get a sense of the interview as a whole before breaking it into parts.

During the data analysis I broke down the data and looked for key words or phrases. I also looked for themes and patterns that emerged from the data of experiences and perceptions of leadership which related directly to my research questions. I also made notes to link them together. This is what Patton (1990) refers to as “inductive analysis” because patterns, themes and categories of analysis emerged from the data rather than being imposed on them prior to data collection and analysis. Finally, the processes of verification and of drawing conclusions followed.

### **3.6 Trustworthiness**

According to Lincoln and Guba (1985, p.290) the aim of trustworthiness in a qualitative inquiry is “to support the argument that the findings are worth paying attention to.”

To enhance trustworthiness I collected data from more than one source for triangulation purposes which increased the validity of my findings. Patton (2002, p. 559) posits that triangulating data sources means “comparing and cross-checking the consistency of information derived at different times by different means within qualitative methods.” I triangulated data collected from interviews by cross-referencing reviews of research regarding leadership as well as looking at the reflective writing of the participants. I obtained a reasonable measure of consistency from each participant although not all the time. In this study triangulation reduced the chance of researcher prejudice and increased trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This served to enhance the credibility of the research findings.

The participants were also granted the opportunity to verify transcriptions of the interview to ensure that their message had been accurately represented, and to accord them the opportunity to add final remarks. This was to ensure that the transcribed data was accurate and that there was no distortion of the data. Also, transferability is well-established in this study through the thick descriptions of the experiences of the participants.

### **3.7 Ethical Considerations**

In this study I tried to make sure that the ethical issues surrounding my research project were addressed. By so doing, it enhanced the quality of my research and contributed to its trustworthiness. I adhered to the research ethics of the University of KwaZulu-Natal where I was registered for my Masters in Education degree. I submitted an ethical clearance application to the University Ethical Clearance Committee and ethical approval was granted. This allowed me to continue with the research process. According to Durrheim (2002) ethics are important because they make research both scientifically and socially acceptable. Similarly, Welman, Kruger and Mitchell (2005) maintain that the general principles invoked in codes of research ethics are that no harm should befall the research subjects and that participants should take part freely based on informed consent.

Participants were informed of the purpose of the research, and their consent to carry out the interviews was asked and granted. They were made aware that their participation in the study was voluntary and that they had a right to withdraw their participation at any stage of the research without any adverse consequences. Their right to privacy and anonymity was also respected. Cohen et al. (2007, p.64) posit that “the essence of anonymity is that information provided by participants should in no way reveal their identity.” Therefore, to preserve anonymity of the interviewed school principals, I used pseudonyms for their names and schools. I did not describe demographics of schools in order to prohibit easy identification.

My position as a departmental official might have made the participants feel uncomfortable, thinking that I wanted to inspect and report on their work. To obviate this misconception I assured the participants before the interview commenced that the purpose of the study was merely to find out what their understanding and experiences of leadership were and not to evaluate them.

Informed consent was obtained from the participants to record the interviews and confidentiality was maintained throughout the research project. This acknowledged all the rights of participants that include the following: anonymity, confidentiality and the right to privacy.

### **3.8 Limitations**

One of the limitations of this study was that the focus was only on three school principals from one district in KwaZulu-Natal, therefore the outcome of this study cannot be generalised. However, the findings brought greater clarity to how these participants make meaning of the phenomena in a specific context. Because this research used a qualitative case study approach to capture in-depth, rich data, it cannot be generalised as it looked at or involved values, belief systems, experiences and perceptions of the principals. Therefore, the outcomes of these variables were not the same in each school. Vithal and Jansen (2006) state that acknowledging limitations empowers the reader to appreciate what constraints were imposed on the study.

I must acknowledge that if the study had broadened its scope of school contexts and a diverse sample of principals, a bigger and richer picture might have emerged and might have influenced my overall findings. Also, the input of teachers and members of the school governing bodies could have added a broader perspective to the outcome of the research. Nevertheless, this does not imply that the small sample was inadequate because the data generated from it was sufficient.

Personal bias is a challenge with which researchers are confronted when doing interpretive studies. However, be that as it may, I can only concede that in an attempt to circumvent this proclivity I constantly reflected on my role as researcher. Also, due to time constraints, I could not observe the actual practices that the principals engaged in at the schools. The research depended on the information that was provided by the principals.

An additional limitation of the study was the evident vestige of feeling inhibited to respond to questions posed to them. This, I suspect, could have been as a result of my position as a departmental official. Therefore, the use of two data generation methods, semi-structured interviews and reflective journal writing helped to validate data and to reduce potential distortions as they complemented each other. Moreover, I allayed their fears by assuring them that all personal information regarding them and their schools would be confidential and that pseudonyms would be used. Once this barrier was removed the interaction became more relaxed so that the information obtained could be more valid and meaningful (De Vos et al., 2005).



### **3.9 Conclusion**

In this chapter I discussed the rationale for choosing the methodological approach approaches. I have further discussed how I selected the participants and how my data analysis was carried out. I must mention that this research study, like any other, is not free of shortcomings. This research employs qualitative case studies which are known to be difficult to generalise from. This is because of the subjectivity which underlines the information provided by participants and the small sample size. Also, these cases were directly linked to my work as a departmental official; therefore it posed a challenge because the participants might have concealed important information because of my position.

I also discussed ethical issues that I dealt with during the research process. The next chapter will give an analysis and presentation of the data.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS**

#### **4.1 Introduction**

This chapter presents a narrative account of the study which was to explore school principals' understanding and experiences of leadership. In presenting my findings I included many direct quotes from the participants to show the similarities and differences in their comments and to illustrate particular understandings and experiences of the participants. Data were generated by using semi-structured interviews and reflective journal entries which have been discussed in Chapter 3.

First, a brief profile of the participants is given, and then I discuss the themes that emerged from the data on how the principals understood and experienced leadership in their respective schools. The themes that emerged were identified as: leadership as a collective endeavour; leadership can make a positive difference; the professional conduct of leaders and teachers and challenges facing principals' leadership.

#### **4.2 Profiles of Participants**

##### ***4.2.1 Principal Kate***

Principal Kate started her teaching career in 1984 at Rainville Primary. She mainly taught in the intermediate and senior phases. In 1999, she was appointed as Head of Department (HOD) at an urban primary school. She taught at this school until 2002.

In 2003 she successfully applied for the Principalship at Rainville Primary. The school is a co-educational institution with an enrolment of 537 pupils and over 34 educators, both state and School Governing Body (SGB) paid. Having assumed this leadership position she realised the importance of her role as a leader and developed herself by enrolling for various courses in school leadership and financial management, to better equip her for the position.

#### **4.2.2 *Principal Ben***

Principal Ben is in his fifties. He has been in the teaching profession for over twenty five years of which fifteen years have been as a principal. He started as a level one educator at his current school Dewdrop Combined. It is a public school on a private property in a rural area. The school is situated in an economically disadvantaged area. As the learner enrolment increased at the school he became Head of Department and later became the Deputy Principal.

The school grew rapidly, resulting in the current enrolment of six hundred learners. It became a combined school, ranging from Grade R to Grade 12, of which he became the first principal. There are twenty one educators at the school. Five serve on the Senior Management Team and sixteen are level one educators. The rapid growth and progress of the school resulted in greater demands being made on him as a leader which prompted him to enrol for a Leadership and Management course at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN). He also works very closely with the farming community and holds a position of leadership in the local farm community police forum. Principal Ben also has a teaching load over and above his leadership and management roles.

#### **4.2.3 *Principal Clare***

Principal Clare is in her fifties. She completed a BA degree and qualified as a teacher with a Diploma in Education specialising in languages. She started her teaching career in Northern Natal at a Secondary School. In her second year of teaching she relocated to the Umgungundlovu district and took up a post at a high school. She showed early signs of leadership by taking on challenges and enrolled for a Diploma in Remedial Education through the University of South Africa (UNISA). Whilst doing this course there was a vacancy at one of the primary schools in the district which had remedial classes for which she applied successfully. Initially she found the transition from teaching matriculants to teaching learners with learning problems challenging, but because of her feisty personality she adjusted and found it enjoyable. She taught at the school for nine years. Principal Clare is also branch secretary of a teacher union and plays a leading role in union matters.

In 2000 she was appointed as HOD at a special school. In 2003 she successfully applied for the Principalship at Sunshine Special Needs School. The school has a learner enrolment of approximately three hundred and a combined staff of fifty eight of whom twenty are educators and the rest are support staff.

She has been in the teaching arena for over twenty five years of which nine years have been as a principal. She also successfully completed the ACE (SL) course at UKZN.

#### **4.2.4 Summary**

The participants in this study are two females and one male. Principal Ben came through the ranks from being a level one educator to HOD and Deputy Principal to Principalship. Principals Kate and Clare served as HOD's before their appointments as principals. These principals each have over twenty five years' experience in the teaching profession. Their experiences of principalship range from nine to fifteen years. The cumulative wealth of experience that each one has gained over the years has made them ideal candidates for this research.

### **4.3 Themes from the Data**

#### **4.3.1 Leadership as a Collective Endeavour**

The data revealed that the three participants' understanding of their leadership is that schools should be managed collectively. This perception seems to be in line with the idea of the South African Schools Act (SASA) (Act 84 of 1996) which calls for active involvement of all stakeholders in all aspects of school decision-making. In order to achieve this objective as Harris and Muijs (2005) state, a collective endeavour implies that decision-making processes should be widely shared amongst all stakeholders of a school.

In this process of working as a team, all three principals felt that it is important to keep the vision of the school in his or her sights. This suggests that whilst they are the drivers of the team they are also active participants who encourage collective decision making with all stakeholders working towards a shared vision.

Principal Ben expressed the opinion that:

*“As a Principal ... I have to be visionary and share my vision with the staff, pupils, parents and community and whilst working with them I realise that leadership begins with me.”* (Interview, p.17)

I concur with this view. Leadership begins with identity because it expresses who you are.

Similarly, Principal Clare remarked:

*“A leader should know how to manage people so as to encourage and inspire them to have this vision realised as a collective.”* (Interview, p.11)

This trend towards teamwork is in line with the view of Rossow and Warner (2000, p.85) that increasingly “school principals are shifting from formal, traditional, top-down decision making to participatory governance.”

The data shows that this shift from a top-down to a bottom-up approach is evidence of how the three principals were attempting to encourage teamwork in their schools.

Principal Kate remarked:

*“I’m as much a member of the team as everybody else, I am not absolved from it – we all work together in it.”* (Interview, p.6)

This notion of working together is what Bush (2003) refers to as a ‘collegial’ model of leadership. The assumption of collegiality is that in a school situation decisions are reached through a process of shared decision making aimed at achieving a common goal rather than an autocratic decision taken by the principal (Bush, 2003). I agree that in terms of displaying a democratic trend towards decision making it is transformational in nature and in line with the expectations of the Department of Education.

According to the data the degree to which the participants were able to elicit a positive response to this collegial approach from their staff varied. This phenomenon surfaced as a result of the conditions prevailing at their respective schools.

For example, the findings show that Principal Kate experienced greater challenges in attempting to adopt a collegial approach. The participant was in a precarious position where she had to maintain a balance between being instructional and collaborative in her approach when teaming with the staff and other stakeholders. She explained:

*“It’s to get that balance right, between how much decision-making and how much do you keep for yourself and how much do you give out to others to do.”* (Interview, p.26)

This finding therefore hints at the fact that the principal was still oscillating between partial and complete power sharing.

This flatter leadership and consultative style was a new concept to which she had to become accustomed. As time progressed the principal tried to adopt a bottom-up leadership style by proactively seeking the input of staff. With the passage of time it became apparent that authority was no longer going to be vested in the principal and senior management only, but that a concerted effort was to be made to ensure that it filtered down to level one educators. Principal Kate’s attempts to move towards a transformational leadership style finds resonance in Somech, (cited in Mokoena, 2011, p.121) that “leaders must be willing to let go of traditional authority roles, not only allowing teachers to have a greater voice but helping to prepare them, providing support and establishing an environment of trust.”

Despite occasional setbacks, the data discloses that Principal Kate continued to adopt a policy of collegiality by proactively seeking the input of the staff:

*“We talk about it at the staff meeting, because maybe management has made a decision and by looking at other people’s points of view...we will change our decision and let people then have their input.”* (Interview, p.24)

From this comment one detects a shrouded approach by Principal Kate towards fostering a collegial working relationship. I believe it is a cascade model where management makes a decision and passes it down. It corroborates the argument made by Bush (2003, p 69) who distinguishes between a ‘restricted’ collegiality where the leader shares power with a limited number of senior colleagues and a ‘pure’ collegiality where all members have an equal voice in determining policy.

Moreover, the data shows that the other two participants, Principals Ben and Clare elicited greater co-operation from the staff and other stakeholders. Both leaders made getting people on board a priority in their leadership approach. They believed in transparency and consultation.

This was evident in Principal Ben's remarks:

*"I believe that through meetings, through consultation that we can lead and make people aware and make everything transparent of what is happening within the school...it is our school, I want us to do things together..."*

(Interview, p.18)

This kind of thinking is in line with the view of Oakley and King (cited in Slater 2008, p. 56) who state that "progressive leaders have come to view shared working relationships and teacher leadership as a form thereof as both influential and necessary because of their potential to contribute to improved teacher professionalism, confidence and retention as well as to improve teaching and learning." These views of Principal Ben are consistent with transformational leadership as outlined in chapter 2.

The same participant reflected on the spontaneity of a staff member:

*"When schools closed, a teacher took a brush cutter and wore protective gear without me asking and cut the grass. I thanked him and in return he thanked me also."* (Interview, p.31)

A display of collegiality is apparent in this interaction between the principal and the staff member. This is in line with the views expressed by Hargreaves (1995, p.150) that this kind of "collegiality among teachers and between teachers and their principals has been advanced as one of the most fruitful strategies for fostering development."

Furthermore, Principal Ben's bottom-up decision making yielded fruitful results because there was greater staff input. This is evident in his remarks:

*"I believe in a flat system, because things work there...This bottom up approach encourages co-operation and leads to our goals being achieved more easily...When it is done we are all achieving."* (Interview, p.43)

This notion is substantiated by Harris and Lambert (2003, p.15) who state that “schools need a culture that promotes collegiality, trust, collaborative working relationships and focuses on teaching and learning.” Also, Hargreaves (1995, p.151) purports that collaboration amongst staff “strengthens resolve, allows weaknesses to be shared and aired and carries people through those failures and frustrations that accompany change.”

In my view it is clear from the responses that these principals made significant attempts in transforming leadership by regarding participation of all staff members as important. According to Trail (2000) there are many benefits of sharing the responsibilities and rewards of leadership with all stakeholders. The author explains that the direct benefit of leadership as a collaborative effort is that principals not only share the lead, but also share the load. This collective or shared leadership attempted by the participants was transformational - as discussed in the literature review thus the data links well with the literature.

Through their interaction with their respective staff members the principals in this study sought to create a culture which promotes teacher leadership and professionalism through teamwork. When they appeal to teachers to assume responsibility for certain tasks to which they readily agree, it accords them the opportunity of playing a leadership role in the smooth running of the school.

This is exemplified in Principal Ben’s statement:

*“At school I experience that the teachers I work with are so much prepared to work even beyond their call of duty...they lead and I practice what is called distributed leadership where I give them the roles to play as well.”*

(Interview, p.18)

This perspective is in line with Grant’s (2010) view that this sharing of activities is at the heart of the distributed leadership model because of its inclusive approach to leadership and its promotion of capacity building. Also, I believe it is what Hickman (cited in Preedy et al., 2012, p.75) refers to as “invisible leadership which is the readiness to rise above self-interest, for the sake of the group’s common purpose.” I concur with this notion that by taking a collective responsibility for leadership, the



school's staff can help prevent a collapse of the change process in the face of shifting personnel or through a change of principal (Trail, 2000).

The data reveals that the day-to-day experiences of shared leadership of the three participants in this study were unique because each situation was different in the different school communities. What is evident from the data is that these collaborative relationships extended beyond the parameters of the school and that there was great enthusiasm and input not only from the teachers, but also from the SGB, parents and the community.

This is evident from the sentiments expressed by Principal Ben:

*“The parents of the school are very helpful they are eager to assist...” and “the relationship between the school and the farmers in the area is very good, they are giving us lots of support.”* (Interview, p.38)

This type of leadership that exploits the talents and resources of all partners of the school to effect change has, as a result, “followers who are being transformed into partners, co-leaders, lifelong learners and collaborators” (Hickman, in Preedy et al., 2012, p.68). I concur with the view that leaders who facilitate collaborative efforts create environments for growth and success. Each principal created opportunities to tap into the leadership capacity of the different stakeholders which had a positive outcome.

Principal Clare's stance towards empowering others through teamwork is that this must be exercised in a distributive manner with the principal occasionally devolving her authority:

*“To be a leader you must be able to relinquish your post as a leader and see leadership potential in other people and so capacitate them...”* (Interview, p.12)

This finding is concomitant with the views of Slater (2008, p.61) who states that “when identity is not tied to position, leaders are able to build capacity within others by tapping into the reservoir of underutilised talent within an organisation thereby providing others with the opportunity to shine, to share their talent and to contribute to the work of the school.” I concur with this notion that principals traditionally have

held on to information as a measure of power and control, but when they let go of this control they empower others in the process (Barth, 2003).

Furthermore, Principal Clare employed a variety of approaches in order to foster teamwork and collegiality amongst her staff members. Being acutely aware of the specialised nature of the school and the diverse cultural groupings on her staff she appreciates the fact that the degree of co-operation will vary from teacher to teacher as each person is different with different perspectives on any given issue.

Hence her remarks:

*“A leader should know how to manage people... we are working with human beings and they all do not necessarily have the same energy and passion that I might have...”* (Interview, p.12)

These sentiments of Principal Clare are in line with the views of Preedy et al. (2012, p.169) that ‘the we’ is a contentious area in building a genuine learning community and while trying to include or move all staff toward a common goal “ there is recognition of the disparate attitudes, values and motivation that compromise a professional body.” I agree with Slater (2008, p.60) that “leaders require a good understanding of the motivations of those whom they are leading; insight that may be gained through really knowing a person’s aspirations, interests, background and experience.”

However, without underestimating the positive contribution teamwork brought to these different schools, the participants found that working as a team can also have challenges in managing a school. There is evidence from the data that the three principals experienced that working collectively with their respective staff members was not readily embraced by all. The reflective journal writing and some of the responses of the participants attest to this.

Principal Clare wrote:

*“I am a people’s person; people’s feelings and things must always be a priority, but sadly it does not work all the time...when you want to implement things that you think will satisfy some people at times or in some*

*incidents- it does not happen like that. So as a leader you are always in for some heart-aches...*" (Journal, p.4)

Principal Kate remarked:

*"I thought I had tried to include everybody on decision making, but they said I was too controlling and should delegate more, but I think we had different views on delegation as well."* (Interview, p.10)

I agree with Davidoff and Lazarus (1997, p.171) who state "that without consultation and negotiation, there is unlikely to be shared ownership of a change process and implementation of ideas is likely to be constrained by lack of commitment." Based on my observation and interpretation of Principal Kate's responses on shared responsibilities, it became apparent that she was encountering challenges in embracing a transformational approach to her leadership.

In assessing these responses from the participants it became clear that by establishing a more collaborative and inclusive decision making process, their leadership skills and capacities were critical. Harris and Lambert (2003) caution that even if principals get everything right, but fail to build positive relationships among staff and attend to the emotional life of an organisation, nothing will work as well as it could or should. Thus, the principals' communication skills and interpersonal relationships were at times tested as they often had to engage in delicate balancing acts of ensuring that everybody's opinion was valued and respected. Upon reflection they appreciated that people have their own opinions, sometimes contrary to those of the team, which had potential conflict as a consequence.

When dealing with conflict situations the participants reflected that the challenge is not to disregard conflict, but to lessen its negative influence and make it a positive force in the school environment. This is evident in Principal Ben's remarks:

*"I do not force them...If you force things like saying the circular says this ...so it must be done. Instead say: this is what the policy says, how can we achieve this thing together - then the teachers have to come up with ways of achieving this."* (Interview, p.20)

It is my considered opinion that this consultative approach to dealing with potentially conflicting issues is the best way of taking the school forward.

The data shows that the participants regarded some important ingredients of teamwork to be open communication, commitment, trust and reflection. Principal Kate sums it up in her reflective journal writing:

*“On reflection, I have learnt many lessons. Most importantly, communication is key to solving problems. Open communication is essential. Trust also has to exist between team members. Team members must trust the principal and the principal must trust the SMT and the staff to perform their tasks professionally.”* (Journal, p.2)

These sentiments are also echoed by the other participants who indicate that they were aware that for successful teamwork to flourish in any environment it should be based on values of openness, trust and participation (Grant, 2006). These codes of behaviour are consistent with the ideals of transformational leadership as espoused by Balyer (2012). This is also in line with the views of Morrison (1998) and that of the Department of Education (2004) that part of the responsibility of managers and in this case, principals, is to create the environment and circumstances which will enable teamwork to flourish and make a positive difference in the school. This theme is explored in detail in the next section.

#### ***4.3.2 Leadership can make a Positive Difference***

The data indicates that the participants considered their major tasks to be to enhance the environment of teaching and learning and to bring about change in the lives of all those associated with the school. The principal’s major task is to make a positive difference.

According to the data Principal Ben had a strong desire to make a positive difference to the school and the community exemplified by the realisation that he had an important role to play as a leader to break the cycle of poverty in the community. The following remark attested to this:

*“The learners must go out and make a difference on their own, in their homes, in a way of developing their homes. We wanted to see the school making a difference in the community.”* (Interview, p.14)

That ‘difference’ according to Drake and Rose (cited in Risimati, 2001, p.12) should “be evident in learners, teachers, parents and all others who have an interest in the school.” This conviction is concomitant with the views of the U.S. Senate cited in Sergiovanni (2001, p.99) that the principal’s leadership “should set the tone of the school, the climate for learning, the level of professionalism and morale of teachers and the degree of concern for what students may or may not become...”

Flowing from their understanding of their leadership and according to the data, it is evident that they grasped the fact that they had to be the driving force to bring about change in their respective schools. Elements of commonality amongst the participants were that:

*“A good leader must have vision and indicate the direction in which he/she hopes to lead the school.”* (Interview, p.17)

Principal Ben indicated that:

*“I believe in a shared vision; you tell them your vision and bring them together...and you deliberate on it and...then they refine it...until they own it.”* (Interview, p.19)

Principal Clare said:

*“You must have vision, know what you hope to achieve and have the energy to drive this vision...Ja, the ultimate vision is a holistic development of our learners... that is my main concern that is my vision at least, if not everybody, a few children must get back into society and hold a job... something that is going to boost their self-esteem because their esteem always plunders in terms of their ability or disability. That is my vision.”* (Interview, p.10)

I agree with this notion because without a clear understanding of your personal and organisational vision, it is difficult to acquire the skills needed for leadership (Rossow & Warner, 2000).

Also, this understanding of a leadership role is in line with the view of Gorton and Alston (2012, p.8) that “the leader must have the organisational vision necessary to direct the organisation into its future and the ability to articulate this vision.” I concur with this view that a good grasp of the school’s vision and mission statement could serve as a powerful stimulant for teaching and learning to take place. This could motivate teachers, learners, parents and the community to have confidence in their school more especially if all stakeholders are involved in the development and production of the school vision. Without the consultation of all stakeholders, inclusive of non-teaching staff, there will be little commitment and compliance as they will not take ownership of the aims and objectives encapsulated in such a document because it is through a shared vision that the principal is able to navigate and communicate the direction for the school. The Department of Education (2004) endorses the view that a school vision is a team effort and that the principal should always ensure that the school vision becomes ‘our vision’. Once this has been achieved, I believe like Singh and Lokotsch (2005), the school can grow towards the envisaged outcome as viewed in the transformational leadership theory.

With the above in mind, this research shows that by having a shared vision with all stakeholders, the three principals demonstrated that they attempted to be transformational in their daily performance of their leadership responsibilities, to make a positive difference. This is akin to the views of Hallinger (2003, p.331) “that transformational leadership is distributed in the sense that it focuses on developing a shared vision.”

In order to direct a common vision the data shows that the participants were aware of the importance of sound interpersonal relationships between themselves and the teachers. This is confirmed in the statement by Principal Clare:

*“A leader should know how to manage people so as to encourage and inspire them to have this vision realised as a collective.”* (Interview, p.11)

This view correlates with that of Slater (2008) who suggests that it is imperative to know your staff in order to develop trust and respect that embodies collaborative relationships. I align myself with the understanding that if leaders foster good

interpersonal relationships it could serve as a catalyst in maintaining and developing trust in an organisation (Ibid, 2008).

To nurture good interpersonal relationships the principals in this study considered, amongst other aspects, inspiring others as an essential ingredient of leadership and that leading by example cannot be overemphasised. According to Principal Kate:

*“A leader should lead by example... my staff must see me doing what I am expecting them to do. How can I expect them to do the work while I sit behind the desk? It is one of the reasons why I have continued to teach a formal subject.”* (Interview, p.7)

Principal Clare holds similar views:

*“I am a hands-on person, who does not want to be seen as a principal sitting behind this table not knowing what I’m talking about....”* (Interview, p.20)

This exemplary leadership by the principals, for me, creates an environment conducive for good interpersonal relationships which in turn impacts positively on the functioning of the school. Teddlie and Reynolds (2000) refer to this conduct of the principals as a hands-on involvement with teaching and learning developments, rather than taking a more hands-off role. Also, the conduct of these principals is what Bennell (cited in Khumalo, 2009) refers to as a form of motivation which influences the behaviours of individuals in attaining the aims and objectives of the workplace.

Whilst there were commonalities in the objectives of supporting their staff in making their schools better institutions of teaching and learning, the data shows that each participant concentrated on specific areas in accordance with the circumstances at their respective schools.

The role of the principal as the transformational leader is critical in changing the attitude and behaviour of educators. In this research the data indicates that the participants were in the forefront, arranging and also conducting workshops which focused on staff development of teachers, support staff and parents in order to keep abreast of latest trends especially with regard to transformation in education. These

workshops were not only for information purposes, but also served as motivational talks. Principal Kate explained:

*“I encourage my teachers to develop themselves in curriculum matters. The school will pay for teachers to go on workshops...it must be school-related. Once a term we do an internal professional workshop where someone addresses the teachers. I conducted a CAPS workshop for staff and parents as well...”* (Interview, p. 17)

Principal Clare echoed these sentiments:

*“Whenever there is a relevant workshop we go for it and we don’t do it individually - the entire staff goes. It serves two purposes - it is about working in harmony with each other, but also developing our skills and knowledge.”* (Interview, p.21)

These initiatives by the principals to develop the educators and other role players in all matters related to their work is a distinctive, progressive characteristic of transformational leadership as pointed out in the literature. Khumalo (2009) reiterates the notion that transformational school leaders develop their educators to boost their confidence in the performance of their duties which translates into teacher satisfaction.

Self-development by teachers is also important in making a positive difference in the schooling process. The data revealed that the principals encouraged their teachers to further their studies, especially those who were un- and under qualified, and to take on leadership positions in the school. For example Principal Ben remarked:

*“One educator is studying towards Matric. She comes back to me and says; Sir, I have discovered that what we are being taught there is what we already do at our school and now I am flying, I am leading. Now, she is gaining confidence. She used to be quiet, but...now she has found her voice...”* (Interview, p.36)

Principal Kate mentioned that some of her staff were personally involved in the writing of text books for the new curriculum CAPS and that their involvement had made a remarkable difference in their attitude towards their work. She stated:



*“They have actually been able to speak with authority on it and they guide others and allay fears that it is not something new.” (Interview, p.27)*

The data revealed that knowledge acquired by teachers had a positive outcome in the classroom. This is evident in the following remark by Principal Kate:

*“It is so interesting to see teachers bring this knowledge back and start implementing it in their classrooms and to see how a worthwhile workshop benefits a teacher and benefits the children.” (Interview, p.29)*

The data above indicates that the principals appreciated the importance of encouraging teachers to realise their potential and have confidence in themselves thus creating opportunities for teacher leadership. The principals saw the connection between leadership opportunity and professional development. This action is corroborated by Hallinger and Huber (2012) that it is the transformative leaders’ task to help their people accomplish the potential they have and the value they can deliver. I believe in the old adage that knowledge is power and if teachers are encouraged to empower themselves through self-development and networking they, in turn can help others “to embrace goals to understand the changes that are needed to strengthen teaching and learning and to co-operate towards achieving a common goal” (Leithwood & Riehl, 2003, p.7).

Being principals of many years’ experience, the participants used networking as a means of empowering teachers to create learning environments for learner success. They regularly interacted with other schools and institutions in close proximity as well as abroad. Networking, in my opinion, is an effective mode of learning as it is a supportive system of sharing information amongst individuals or groups with common interests. Emanating from the data the principals harnessed the advantages of networking to the benefit of their respective schools with the objective of mutual enrichment.

It was evident from the data that these principals understood that by networking with other stakeholders the teachers would benefit in the sense that their knowledge would be deepened and their confidence boosted, ultimately benefiting the learners. I contend that people learn more from each other than working in isolation and running the risk of becoming stagnant and stereotyped in their teaching practice.

This is evident from the following remark by Principal Ben:

*“I ask for support from the surrounding private schools...either they come here to share ideas or for the teachers to go there; we have a very good relationship with them. My teachers gain like that.”* (Interview, p.29)

This is in line with the views of Burdett (2003) that the advantages of networking and collaborating are that groups are more productive, creative and motivated than individuals on their own. This understanding is also confirmed by Bhengu (2005) who suggests that principals who are transformational leaders facilitate effective networking with the aim of sharing knowledge, ensuring best practices, offering support and monitoring progress. I concur that principals should create time and opportunities for teachers for “continuous professional development which should not only focus on their skills and knowledge, but also on aspects specific to their leadership roles” (Harris & Muijs, 2005, p.443).

Be that as it may, for me, networking does not just happen; the principal has to engage in appropriate preparation in order to elicit positive outcomes. Because networking sometimes elicits a mixed reception from participants, it is here that the leadership acumen of the principal is tested as pointed out in chapter two. The data shows that Principal Clare used networking as an effective mode to create opportunities for her learners with special needs by establishing partnerships with institutions and primary schools adjacent to her school. This was evident from her comments:

*“We have created a pre-vocational programme at the school. We go out in the community and we look at big or small businesses and speak to them and ask them would they not take our learners, to give them very basic training in particular skills first to see whether they at the age of twenty one will be able to get a job.”* (Interview, p.13)

These collaborative efforts by the principal to make a positive difference in the life of her learners with special needs are in line with the views of Chikoko et al. (2011) who state that the principal is responsible for creating and preparing an environment for learner achievement.

In addition, the findings show that the participants saw themselves as serving their people by making sure that they have the necessary resources to facilitate networking and teaching in order to reach the goals that have been set. Principal Kate remarked:

*“There is quite a large budget set aside for professional development of teachers and the procurement of required resources ...”* (Interview, p.17).

Principal Ben stated:

*“I have this relationship with people overseas...I just have to say what we need...This results in the school often receiving learner and support material especially for the library and the computer room.”* (Interview, p.40)

Gorton and Alston (2012) contend that leaders should provide the tools that teachers need to be successful by removing obstacles that prevent them from reaching their objectives. I agree, the ability of the principal to secure the required resources and to establish good relationships with other role-players for the benefit of the school would have a positive influence on the teachers’ own practices and attitude towards their work. These principals, I believe, like Sergiovanni (2001) are transformative leaders who craft social structures to unify people towards shared values and ideas.

Moreover, it is clear from the findings that Principal Clare used networking as an appropriate opportunity to develop new approaches to resolving differences especially when dealing with her support staff and some of the parents who were from a different cultural and ethnic group. The services of an interpreter were engaged in the form of the chairperson of the School Governing Body (SGB) who was from that cultural background, to preside at the parents’ meetings. He also played a crucial role in resolving disputes which arose between the principal and support staff from time to time. These approaches by Principal Clare, according to Sergiovanni (2006) become crucial especially where economic, religious, cultural and other differences need to be brought together into a mutually respected whole.

It emerged from the study that the participants appreciated that by networking with stakeholders and other institutions creates better opportunities for teachers and learners. The principals concurred that properly planned networking sessions had

several positive results. During these networking sessions, rank and position was of no significance as everyone had a common objective of improving the process of teaching and learning. All participants made constructive suggestions and recommendations resulting in fruitful and productive outcomes. This bears testimony of the principals' intention to engage all staff members and stakeholders in the decision making process. This approach finds resonance in the view of Morrison (1998) that when membership of the network is seldom linked to seniority or position in a hierarchy the social architecture of the network is fluid. It is clear from the data that the three principals were amenable to changing their schools into learning organisations by displaying transformational leadership. For this type of leadership to emerge Campbell (1997) illuminates the importance of leaders conducting themselves in a manner that is becoming of their profession. In the next section I look at what the data revealed about how these principals acted in a professional manner.

#### ***4.3.3 The Professional Conduct of Leaders and Teachers***

The data indicates that the three participants regarded acting in a professional manner in one's leadership role as being important. They considered various factors to be at play in shaping an individual's idea of professionalism. For them professionalism was about attitudes, behaviours, ethics, morals, values, and knowledge. They considered these to be important elements of their professional conduct and respect inside and outside the school environment.

These virtues were strongly emphasised in the following comment by Principal Kate:

*“For me it is about walking the walk and talking the talk. It is leading by example. Being a professional leader is making sure that you are at school, prepared for every lesson that day, prepared to do the work that goes with it...your interaction with parents, your interaction with your colleagues...”*

(Interview, p.16)

The above views are echoed by Broadfoot et al. (1988) that an educator's environment, notions and perceptions all play an important role in shaping their overall understanding of their professional requirements.

In addition, the data indicates that all three participants had a common point of departure relating to their understanding of their leadership as professionals in that it begins with introspection. They commented that thinking about their respective actions, responsibilities and habits on a regular basis was important for them to relate to their staff in a professional manner. Principal Clare put it like this:

*“There is a lot of reflection that must go on all the time... When I go home I start to reflect...if I do this, what is that going to mean for this person. So it is all the time reflecting, going back and forth. It is a day to day activity of being a leader and having to change every now and then.”* (Interview, p.17)

It is my considered opinion that these convictions of Principal Clare underpin what an effective principal believes in and values regarding his or her role as a leader. The above comments show that the principals in this study recognise the need to change and continually seek to improve their leadership. This understanding of the participants is akin to the views of Gupton (2003, p.3) who believes that if principals are to be more than managers, they must “have at the centre of their work and being, a set of core values that propels their work into the ranks of real leadership.” The author further states that there is no value-free leadership, “the term is an oxymoron because at the heart of leadership and its close companion - good decision making - are values and beliefs that form the framework for guiding behaviours and actions” (Gupton, 2003, p.3).

I am in agreement with this notion that the behaviours and actions of these participants were governed by their values. The data shows that they displayed their professional leadership when interacting with their staff, pupils and other stakeholders. Whilst embracing the new approach to running schools by shared decision making, consultation and transparency they realised ultimate accountability rested with them. These high standards of ethical values are evident from Principal Ben’s remarks:

*“I am not trying to relinquish or abdicate my responsibility ...but I would like us to do things together. If things go wrong, we are all in it, but I have to account and I am responsible.”* (Interview, p.31)

Also Principal Kate stated:

*“We are here, not for me, not for individual glory - we do what we do to benefit the children.”* (Interview, p.12)

These moral values displayed by the participants are evidence of their commitment to the profession. This is in accordance with the views expressed by Botha (2004) that good principals value commitment and courage to stand up for things that are truly important in education which is to provide better teaching and learning opportunities. In addition SACE (2000) recommends in the code of professional ethics that leaders should display high personal standards or attributes towards learners, parents and colleagues. It is also noted by Morrison (1998) that teachers, and in this case principals, who accept responsibility for the way in which a job is done, display a high degree of professionalism.

This professional conduct is also displayed in the values and actions illustrated by two of the participants who endeavoured to retain a keen sense of balance between exercising their authority while retaining the trust of their staff in the execution of their duties. This is evident from the following comment by Principal Kate:

*“The leader should always have the finger on the pulse. I don’t mean controlling that I have got to have all the power and all the authority, but I need to know what is going on within the broader school community; that is my responsibility.”* (Interview, p.8)

This thinking is in line with Sergiovanni’s (2001) view that the concept of exercising power while retaining the trust of followers depends to a large extent on the principal’s leadership and professional acumen to discern the subtle difference between power and authority. I concur that for these relationships to work they have to be based on trust and respect between principal and teachers.

What further emerged from the data is that Principal Clare believed that leadership started with herself as the leader of the institution by readily admitting her shortcomings and inadequacies as a leader. This authentic frankness to others about “her beliefs and actions allows for integrity” (Fullan, 2006, p.28). This in turn generated spontaneous co-operation from the staff. The participant showed a huge measure of trust in her staff members, especially the SMT to run the school efficiently in her absence.

She conceded:

*“I falter every now and then...I try to conduct myself in a professional way...I have lots of confidence in the SMT. I am at peace if I am at home, I don't worry about the school.”* (Interview, p.19)

By entrusting the running of the school occasionally to the SMT, this participant displayed the attributes of a transformational leader. Not only did she show trust in them, but she had as her objective the desire to develop and empower them. It is also the take of Whitaker, (cited in Singh and Lokotsch, 2005) that the transformational leader makes a fundamental power shift from power of authority vested in position, to power vested in people. I contend that building trusting relationships between staff and principals needs to start with principals being kind, considerate, and confident and they need to empower teachers. This is indicative of transformative leadership becoming moral because it raises the level of human conduct and ethical aspiration of both leader and led (Sergiovanni, 2001).

All three principals indicated the importance of building trusting relationships amongst the adults within the school. Furthermore, the principals realised that respect, trust, commitment and satisfaction are central in determining relationship quality (Graf et al., 2011). The participants believed that trusting and respecting the abilities of their teachers could encourage teacher leadership to emerge. For them it was the backbone of community building and enhancing professionalism in schools, (MacNeil, in Sergiovanni, 2001).

However, what surfaced from the data is that not all the participants were equally successful in building professional trusting relationships with their staff. Principal Kate experienced challenges in building trusting relationships with some staff members regarding their interpretation with the concept of professionalism; this often led to conflict situations. This had a negative impact on the principal's ability to run the school effectively as she was continually engaged in a balancing act of exercising her authority and granting her staff latitude to make input. This is evident in Principal Kate's remarks:

*“The last couple of months have not been a pleasant experience for me. I probably have walked the walk, but not talked the talk because of the*

*clashes and tensions that developed between a member of the SMT and me... ” (Interview, p.7)*

She elaborates further:

*“My idea of professionalism appears to be quite different to the idea of professionalism of some members of my staff and there have been things that have happened... I believe they are personal matters... yet they have been publically discussed in the staffroom, which has led to a very different view of professionalism on my staff at the moment.” (Interview, p.16)*

The data shows that this regrettable experience of unprofessionalism resulted in the principal’s decision to relocate to another school. This onerous decision was the culmination of lengthy periods of introspection and consultation. Principal Kate remarked:

*“These unfortunate experiences have left me asking myself lots of questions...It broke my confidence... and that is part of the reason why I have decided to leave because I don’t believe that I am going to be able to rebuild my confidence totally in this environment any longer.” (Interview, p.8)*

It is clear from the data that the despondency felt by the participant to manage the conflict and maintain the trust and respect of the staff as a result of the unprofessional behaviour of a staff member highlighted how differences of opinion aggravated the relations and attempts at working as a team in the school. This conflict created cliques and a breakdown in communication. The principal indicated how the unmanaged conflict led to psychological trauma and stress.

Whilst the trajectory embarked upon by the principal may give the impression of being that of a defeatist she regarded this decision as being in the best interest of the institution and herself. The boldness with which the participant confessed her shortcomings is commendable and it clearly indicates that she is a person of high moral values. It was triangulated in her reflective journal data that this unpalatable situation had arisen despite attempts made by her to seek consensus through dialogue:



*“I have requested assistance for the staff, but this has been blocked at SMT level...” “I brought in an outsider to meet the SMT in order to try and find a remedy and a way forward. This was not successful.” (Journal, p.2)*

According to Msila (2012) constitutional values such as human dignity and equality, which are embedded in the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, cannot be attained in an atmosphere and context where conflict is prevalent. He also states that conflict is an important aspect that calls for professional development among principals (Ibid, 2012).

The data also revealed that the lack of professionalism experienced by Principal Clare was more apparent among the non-teaching staff. This was mainly as a result of their lack of understanding of the concept of professionalism. This could be ascribed to the diverse cultures and varied levels of education. The participant being a professionally trained person resorted to enlisting the assistance of the chairperson of the SGB to help resolve the conflict. This position finds resonance with the views expressed by Runde and Flanagan (cited in Msila, 2012) that most leaders see conflict in negative terms, only a few see it as an opportunity to effect change in an organisation. Msila (2012) states that if organisations are to prosper, there is a need for leaders and managers to develop conflict competence.

It is interesting to note that according to the data Principal Ben was very tactful in dealing with conflict situations in that he asked the opposite party to come up with a possible solution in order to avoid a confrontational situation from developing. It often resulted in a resolution being arrived at by consensus. He clearly had a good grasp of the attributes of professional diplomacy. The findings are consistent with the research by Runde and Flanagan (cited in Msila, 2012) who purport that school principals who can differentiate between functional and dysfunctional conflicts will know how to act in times of conflict. I now proceed to discuss what the principals' views on professional development are.

#### ***4.3.4 The Principals' Perspective on Professional Development***

My findings reveal that all three principals in the study have the common understanding that continual training and development of both professional and non-professional staff, starting with themselves, is important. The principals' desire for excellence in their schools is demonstrated by their enrolment for the ACE (SL) course and other relevant courses to equip them to manage their schools more effectively in times of change to become professional places of teaching and learning.

They indicated that: "continuously upgrading and uplifting and becoming knowledgeable about particular aspects of the school that is very important."

This view is supported by Msila and Mtshali (2011) who maintain that professionally developed leaders will be effective and in turn will be effective change managers. I am in agreement with this statement; leaders who believe in self-development will be ideal in encouraging and empowering their own teachers as leaders especially in a time of transformation. Msila and Mtshali (2011,p.3) postulate that when " teachers are actively involved and empowered in the reform of their own schools, curriculum, pedagogy and classrooms, even those with minimal levels of formal education and training are capable of dramatically changing their teaching behaviour, the classroom environment and improving the achievement of their learners."

The above view is strongly supported by Morris (2014, p.32) that "effective leaders who make a difference to student development take care of their own learning because without this there is less likelihood of overall systemic improvement."

What emerged strongly from the findings is that the principals perceived professional development as an agent to enhance their confidence to improve communication with their staff members, parents and the community at large. This, they believed would create learning environments which could present opportunities for learner success. The data shows that effective communication is a prerequisite of leadership in building professional relationships and trust. It is abundantly clear in the remarks by Principal Kate:

*“... Open communication is essential. Trust also has to exist between team members. Team members must trust the principal and the principal must trust the staff to perform their tasks professionally”.* (Journal, p.2)

This finding is consistent with the report by the Task Team on Education Management Development (1996) which states that where there is poor communication, the scope for resistance is increased considerably. It suggests that to overcome this resistance, there should be open lines of communication, participation and involvement of all stakeholders. I find common ground with this view, because it is indicative that through improved communication principals could exemplify professional relationships and transformative leadership.

In addition, through effective communication school leaders can establish common ground in the development of trust and relationships. Sergiovanni (2001, p.380) is more explicit in his opinion that the management of trust ensures that the principal's role in the school and the leadership she or he expresses are viewed as “credible, legitimate and honest.”

Furthermore, the participants believed that professional development had the potential to promote confidence in themselves and others and also foster a culture of lifelong learning. All three participants tried to work in collaboration with their teachers, parents and other stakeholders towards transforming their schools into learning centres of excellence, according to the needs of the school in particular and the community at large. They sought to achieve these objectives by sharing experiences and information gained through networking, workshops and self-development. These activities helped to promote a culture of ongoing lifelong learning. The participants believed that the teachers should be encouraged to develop to their fullest potential as professionals because ultimately the learners would benefit. This was quite evident in the following remarks of Principal Clare:

*“...They must be well skilled to do whatever they have to do well”... “Some educators are taking up their studies doing their Masters Degrees and we encourage them.”* (Interview, p. 20)

This resonates with the views of scholars such as Barth (1988) and Ibrahim (2011) who state that principals should be encouraged through their own professional

development to support teachers not only through words, but also by actions and in doing so allow teachers to remain professionally and personally satisfied over the entire course of their careers.

These findings tie in with the views of Taole (2013) who maintains that the teaching profession requires individuals who are highly skilled and knowledgeable if they wish to be effective educators. Consequently, one can gather from the findings that the principals understood their leadership to be typified by highly skilled and knowledgeable individuals.

Having discussed how the principals understood and experienced leadership I now look at some of the challenges they encountered.

#### ***4.3.5 Challenges facing the Principals' Leadership***

The findings from this study show that the participants indicated that their leadership faced academic, behavioural and social challenges. Some of these challenges are discussed below.

##### *4.3.5.1 Support*

The data shows that two of the participants in this study mentioned the limited support from the Department of Education and varying degrees of support from parents. According to the data Principal Kate's leadership was challenged by a member of the SMT. It led to confrontational situations which could not be amicably resolved internally by way of mediation and arbitration. The conflict situation became tangible and manifested itself when there was tension which affected the rest of the staff. The principal enlisted the help of a Senior Departmental Official hoping for a resolution to the situation, but it was not forthcoming. This unresolved conflict escalated to a point where there was a breakdown in effective communication and professional relationships. Consequently the principal voluntarily opted to relocate to another school. In cases of this nature Botha (2004) states that principals feel isolated and seldom

know who to turn to for advice. The author suggests the concept of a “critical friend” in this regard.

According to Terry, (cited in Botha, 2004, p.24) schools need “friends who diagnose difficulties and their possible causes and set out recommendations requiring action.” This view is supported by the recommendation of the Minister of Education that in order for leadership to be effective, “educational leadership must be more supportive and directive of the change process” (DoE, 1996, p.28). I am of the opinion that it is of paramount importance that principals are supported by their supervisors to develop professionally to ensure that they lead schools better to become professional places of teaching and learning.

With the introduction of a democratic dispensation in South Africa in 1994 many changes were effected in our education system and schools found it challenging to sustain innovation without ongoing departmental support. This was particularly so regarding the many and varied approaches to the curriculum. The findings indicate that the support from the department by way of workshops was inadequate and often perfunctory resulting in teachers being confused as to what was expected of them. This is evident from the remarks of Principal Kate:

*“...the biggest challenge has been all the curriculum changes...I think these have been the biggest challenge trying to get the teachers used to change.”* (Interview, p.27)

In addition, a major issue of frustration for Principal Clare was that the curriculum did not make provision for schools with learners who have special needs. The principal indicates that they have to modify or adapt the teaching methods to accommodate learners with special needs as the curriculum has not been modified at national level. Moreover, Principal Clare’s primary concern was the need for more support from the DoE’s psychological services. According to Bennett et al. (2003) frustrations arising from situations such as these have been identified as causes of stress, which could lead to underperformance.

The principals in this study believe that if they, as change agents, are given the support that they need, managing change will be more easily accomplished. This notion is supported by the report of the Task Team on Education Management Development (1996) that it is important for people who work in an ever changing context to receive adequate infrastructural resources, training and support, particularly in the expansion of new skills required in terms of new approaches. I believe, like the participants, that for training and support to be effective it should be ongoing as education, by its very nature, is a lifelong process.

Principal Clare also lamented the paucity of parental support. The information from the research reveals that the parents of this special needs school were either illiterate or had limited formal education and felt too inhibited and intimidated to serve on the school governance structures or even to attend parents' meetings. Therefore, the non-response of parents becomes a leadership challenge in the sense that the principal cannot discuss the situation relating to their children with them. This results in the principal often having to act in locum parentis. The situation can sometimes become untenable when the principal has to make important decisions on behalf of the parents on matters relating to the special needs of their children.

This lack of support from parents is also raised in research done by Risimati (2001) who states that parents sometimes feel intimidated by school principals, staff or teachers and feel that they lack the expertise to help educate their children. The low level of interest of the parents in the learning procedures of their children also adds to the stress levels of the principal and staff. This came through very strongly in Principal Clare's data:

*“It is very difficult to get people on board, but we have managed to do so with lots of encouragement (emphasis) and saying to them we will assist them all the way, but it is difficult and stressful.”*  
(Interview, p.3)

This tactic by the principal finds resonance in the thinking of Risimati (2001) who claims that parents should certainly be guided by principals, educators or

similarly trained people to meet the challenges of providing the support their children need to succeed.

Finally, I believe that a collaborative culture with effective leadership in schools requires continual support from all levels of education to minimise stress levels during this period of transformation.

#### 4.3.5.2 *Resistance to Change*

What emerged from the data was that managing change, one of the key skills required by principals as school leaders, was a challenge for one of the participants. As reported earlier in this chapter the conflict experienced by the participant was as a result of resistance to change. Principal Kate indicated that the staff considered her to be a control freak despite her concerted efforts in embracing the new approach of bottom-up decision making.

The following remark is evidence of this:

*“I thought I had tried to include everybody on decision making, but they said I was too controlling...”* (Interview, p.10)

The consequential resistance was reflected in teachers’ reluctance to cooperate. This reaction is in line with the views of Morrison (1998) who contends that people’s reactions to change vary in accordance with their perceptions of change.

Moreover, Principal Kate’s attempts to encourage teamwork amongst the staff proved to be a daunting challenge to her leadership. The data reveals that there was almost palpable resistance to transformation relating to new ideas from younger teachers on the staff. This was noted in her following remarks:

*“It is the newer teachers who are coming in with the new ideas who are saying, come, let’s try this...The older staff will say: ‘Oh we’ve never done it like that before –we are not going to do it like that now’.”* (Interview, p.12)

According to the data the principal maintains that the resistance by the older teachers in relinquishing their comfort zones is a challenge to her ability of complementing the old with the new. The reluctance of the teachers to embrace change could be ascribed to the uncertainties as to how the proposed change would affect them. The findings emerging from this school are reflected in the research by Greenberg and Baron cited in Zimmerman (2006) who is of the opinion that unless teachers understand and appreciate the need for change in their schools, their interest in maintaining the status quo will undoubtedly take precedence over their willingness to accept change.

#### **4.4 Conclusion**

In this chapter, I discussed themes that surfaced from the data. I made use of the literature I reviewed as a lens to focus on the understanding and experiences of leadership of principals in three schools.

My study has shown how the three principals endeavoured to be exemplary in leading their schools to become professional places of teaching and learning.

The research found that their understanding of successful leadership is that their attempts to accomplish their goals and aims for their schools must utilise a collective effort towards achieving a common objective to ensure that the schools become professional places of teaching and learning. The study found that there are many benefits in working as a team. However, their experiences of their leadership roles as principals in their respective schools varied, yet were in a sense, similar.

In addition, the views of the three principals narrating their experience of leadership were similar, but differed slightly depending on their personalities and the structure of their respective schools. The principals also acknowledged the importance of them effectively managing change in a professional manner in order to enhance a collaborative culture. They found that there were many benefits in working towards a collaborative milieu; however challenges facing their leadership also emerged in the research.

The last chapter will present the summary, conclusion and recommendations.



## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

#### **5.1 Introduction**

In this chapter I present a summary of my main findings and make recommendations emerging from the findings. This study led to a number of conclusions. It revealed that through the principals' understanding and experiences of leadership, transformational leadership at my sample schools is emerging, albeit at varying degrees. It also revealed that the principals were committed to creating a climate conducive for teaching and learning. The challenges hindering their leadership are also presented in this chapter.

#### **5.2 Summary of the Main Findings**

Firstly, in this study I began to explore the three principals' understanding of leadership and found that each participant understood and described the concept largely according to the roles they played within the context and vision of their respective schools.

The common thread that runs through the principals' understanding of leadership is that their attempts at achieving their goals and aims for the school must be a collective endeavour. Whilst their approaches may be varied, the direction is generally towards a common objective to ensure that their schools become professional places of teaching and learning.

The participants shared a common understanding of leadership: that their primary role is to educate young people to meet the challenges of the future. The key issue that emerged from the principals' understanding of leadership was to display exemplary leadership, having identified a shared vision. Having said that, they realised that this process would have to take cognisance of the importance of accountability and transparency. It would be desirable for the procedure to be an inspirational exercise to empower others and to operate as a team through the system of networking. In managing such an undertaking some of the primary objectives would entail promoting communication and joint decision making. Hopefully, this engagement would foster basic honourable principles such as loyalty and trust in a changing society.

Secondly, the data that was captured from the three participants on how they experience their leadership roles as principals proved to be similar, yet in a sense varied.

Generally speaking the principals arrived at the understanding that while they may pursue different goals through different means, underpinning the dynamics of leader activity lies the assumption that good leaders can make a positive difference.

The experiences of the principals were that where a group of people interact, the potential for conflict can impact either negatively or positively on relationships depending on how such conflict is managed. In the new political dispensation after 1994, principals had to deal with potential conflict situations as a result of resistance to change. In the principals' attempts to address these situations, networking sessions were arranged to communicate these issues to staff in a transparent manner. In this way many fears were allayed resulting in the creation of mutual trust.

Finally, all three participants regarded ethics, morals and values as important components of the teaching profession, inside and outside the school environment. They also have the common understanding that continual training and upgrading of both professional and non-professional staff, starting with themselves, is important. The principals' desire for excellence in their schools is demonstrated by their enrolment for the ACE (SL) course to equip them to manage their schools more effectively in order that they become professional places of teaching and learning.

### **5.3 Conclusions**

The study found that the manner in which the principals in this study understood leadership influenced the way in which they managed their schools. Although there were discernible commonalities in their understanding of this concept, the study indicates that they experienced this abstraction differently.

My study revealed that the principals understood leadership to be a shared enterprise. This was an indication of a huge paradigm shift from the old hierarchical top-down decision making approach to one of power sharing.

The concept of transformation has become a priority with the principals in this study in the running of their schools as they must be seen to be the agents of change. The study shows

that emanating from their understanding of leadership, it is evident that they grasped the fact that leadership starts with themselves and that they have to be the driving force to bring about change. Also, from the findings one can deduce that one of the most challenging features of the change process for some of the principals was the concept of shared and collective decision making, based on flatter structures. This new approach to leading and managing schools was an endeavour to encourage input and better interpersonal relationships amongst all stakeholders. Notwithstanding the fact that the principals embraced the modus operandi of empowering teachers and other stakeholders, it was clear from the study that they still deemed themselves to be ultimately accountable.

The study suggests that by virtue of their leadership, the principals sought to create a culture which promotes teacher leadership and professionalism by encouraging networking through teamwork. For them leadership was not confined to headship only, but required a team effort. This team effort facilitated the creation of an environment conducive to teaching and learning. The findings reveal that according to the participants' experience some of the important ingredients of teamwork were: open communication, good interpersonal relationships, trust, commitment, care and reflection amongst the team. Furthermore, it is worth noting that two of the three principals' honest endeavour at interacting with their staff in a transparent manner in steering the team effort often resulted in a greater sense of loyalty and mutual trust towards the school. There is evidence from the findings that all three principals experienced that working collectively was daunting at times and they had to work hard for any hope of success.

It was observed that whilst they were in the forefront of leading the team they were also active participants who encouraged collective decision making with all stakeholders working towards a shared vision. It is clear from the study that the three attempted to be transformational in the daily execution of their leadership responsibilities by sharing their vision with all relevant stakeholders. This confirms the view of Hallinger (2003) that transformational leadership is distributed in the sense that it concentrated on a shared vision.

The findings also showed that the principals understood that their leadership roles entailed directing a common vision by promoting sound interpersonal relationships between themselves, teachers, parents and the community. For this to be achieved, the importance of good communication skills cannot be overemphasised, as shown in the study.

In addition the findings indicated that the principals considered inspiring others and leading by example as essential ingredients to nurture good interpersonal relationships. Hence, this exemplary leadership style by the three principals impacted positively on the functioning of the schools towards becoming professional places of teaching and learning. By demonstrating transformational leadership traits these principals were responsive in transforming their schools into learning organisations.

Therefore, the conclusion of how these principals understood leadership highlights the importance of their conducting themselves in a professional manner at all times. What emerged strongly from the findings was that the manner in which the principals understood leadership determined how they managed their schools.

The approaches that they adopted in managing their respective schools were influenced by elements such as ethics, morals and values as encapsulated in the vision and mission statements of their respective schools. The actions of the principals displayed professionalism in that there was commitment to change and continuous improvement. The findings of this study demonstrated that the commitment to change by the principals implied a realisation that they had to act in a professional manner, starting with introspection. This approach by the participants resonates with the views of Zimmerman, (2006, p.239) that “principals should overcome their own resistance in order to change the way they lead their organisations.” The principals appreciated that to be a leader required a delicate balancing act between exercising their authority and maintaining the trust of their staff in the execution of their duties.

By adopting a transformational approach to leading and managing their schools in a professional manner the principals demonstrated a paradigm shift: “from distributing power of authority vested in position to power vested in people” (Whitaker, in Singh & Lokotsch, 2005, p.282).

This indicates the importance the principals attached to fostering trusting relationships amongst themselves and the staff. By trusting and respecting the teachers’ abilities, the principals encouraged teacher leadership to surface. It is important that school leaders display capabilities to interact with staff in ways that engender positive attitudes (Bhengu & Gounder, 2014). Nevertheless, by the same token there were challenges with the building of trusting relationships which culminated in some unprofessional conduct as revealed in the study.

Moreover, the principals understood their leadership roles to be typified by highly skilled and knowledgeable individuals. The continual training and development of both professional and non-professional staff, starting with themselves, was deemed important. What emerged from the findings is that self-development proved to be advantageous for the principals and teachers because the ultimate beneficiaries would be the learners.

Whilst one can appreciate the intrepid efforts made by the principals in this study to lead their schools to become professional places of teaching and learning, there were more formidable challenges facing their leadership. The study shows that these included, but were not confined to the following: limited support from the Department of Education regarding the many changes in the curriculum; failing to assist principals with conflict resolution; the indifference of some parents relating to issues affecting their children; and experiencing difficulty in managing the process of transformation.

#### **5.4 Recommendations**

In view of what has surfaced in this research the following recommendations may be helpful to address some of the challenges experienced by principals in leading their schools. It might also help to prepare aspiring principals, novice principals and supervisors to execute their duties more efficiently and effectively. From the outcome of my findings I would like to make the following recommendations:

- All principals should be provided opportunities to develop key relevant skills with an emphasis on public relationships, interpersonal relationships; effective communication skills and conflict resolution in particular, which will enable them to fulfil their leadership roles with greater confidence.
- It is important for the relevant departmental officials to monitor the principal's progress regularly in order to render the essential support.
- Principals also need ongoing professional development throughout their careers. Other avenues could be explored for instance the creation of professional cluster groups/forums for principals to offer a more effective and consistent approach to the smooth running of schools.
- Further research is recommended to explore issues around the needs of Principals of special schools.

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## APPENDIX I

### Section A: Motivation for Change of Dissertation Thesis Title



UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULU NATAL  
 COLLEGE OF HUMANITIES  
 FACULTY OF EDUCATION

Motivation for Change of Dissertation/ Thesis Title

NAME OF STUDENT: URSULA MARIA CAROLINE KRAFT  
 STUDENT NUMBER: 209533774  
 CAMPUS: Edgewood Pietermaritzburg - X  
 DEGREE: MED (Educational, Management and Leadership)

SCHOOL: Education

NAME OF SUPERVISOR: Prof. V. Chikoko

NAME OF CO-SUPERVISOR: n/a

CURRENT TITLE: Leadership and Professionalism through the eyes of School Principals.  
 Three Case Studies in the Umgungundlovu District.

MOTIVATION FOR CHANGE/ALTERATION OF DISSERTATION/THESIS TITLE:

Upon reflection I have deemed it necessary to refine the title of my thesis; whilst retaining the essence of the process and content. I request permission to change my current title:

Leadership and Professionalism through the eyes of School Principals.  
 Three Case Studies in the Umgungundlovu District.

To my new title:

School Principals' Understanding and Experiences of Leadership.

DATE: 10 September 2015

STUDENT SIGNATURE: 

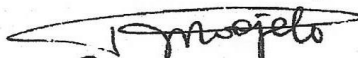
DATE: 08 October 2015

SUPERVISOR: 

DATE: \_\_\_\_\_

CO-SUPERVISOR: N/A

Title change Approved



Prof. P.J. Majojele

14/10/2015

## Section B: Approval of Change of Dissertation Thesis Title



Research Office, Govan Mbeki Centre  
Westville Campus  
Private Bag x54001  
DURBAN, 4000  
Tel No: +27 31 260 8350  
Fax No: +27 31 260 4609  
[invmem@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:invmem@ukzn.ac.za)

25 January 2012

Mrs UMC Kraft (209533774)  
School of Education & Development

Dear Mrs Kraft,

**PROTOCOL REFERENCE NUMBER:** HSS/0003/012M

**PROJECT TITLE:** Leadership and professionalism through the eyes of primary school principals: Three case studies in the Umgungundlovu Districts

In response to your application dated 12 November 2011, 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 school/department for a period of 5 years.

I take this opportunity of wishing you everything of the best with your study.

Yours faithfully

Professor Steven Collings (Chair)  
HUMANITIES & SOCIAL SCIENCES RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE

cc. Supervisor – Dr I Muzvidziwa  
cc. Mrs S Nalcker / Mr N Memela

## APPENDIX II

### Permission to Conduct Research in the KZN DoE Institutions



**kzn education**

Department:  
Education  
KWAZULU-NATAL

Enquiries: Sibusiso Alwar

Tel: 033 341 8610

Ref.:2/4/8/154

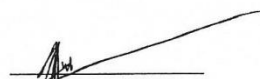
Ms. Ursula Maria Caroline Kraft  
126 Woodlands Road Woodlands  
Pietermaritzburg  
3201

Dear Ms. Kraft

#### PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN THE KZN DoE INSTITUTIONS

Your application to conduct research entitled: **Leadership and Professionalism through the Eyes of Principals: Three Case Studies in the Umgungundlovu District**, 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 January 2012 to 28 February 2013.
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 Mr. Alwar 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 Director-Resources Planning, Private Bag X9137, Pietermaritzburg, 3200.
10. Please note that your research and interviews will be limited to the following Schools and Institutions:

  
Nkosinathi S.P. Sishi, PhD  
Head of Department: Education

2012-02-18  
Date

...dedicated to service and performance  
beyond the call of duty.

KWAZULU-NATAL DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

POSTAL: Private Bag X9137, Pietermaritzburg, 3200, KwaZulu-Natal, Republic of South Africa

PHYSICAL: Office G 25, 188 Pietermaritz Street, Metropolitan Building, Pietermaritzburg 3201

TEL: Tel: +27 33 341 8610 | Fax: +27 33 3341 8612 | E-mail: sibusiso.alwar@kzndoe.gov.za |  
Web: www.kzneducation.gov.za

### APPENDIX III

#### Letter of consent Principal/School Governing Body

University of KwaZulu-Natal  
Private Bag X01  
Scottsville  
3209

The Principal

.....  
.....  
.....

Dear Sir/Madam

Re: Letter of informed consent: Educational Research Project

I am currently studying for a Master's Degree in Educational Management and Leadership at the University of KwaZulu - Natal, Pietermaritzburg. In order to complete this degree I need to conduct a research project. My research topic is: **School Principals' Understanding and Experiences of Leadership.**

The purpose of this research is to explore the kind of understanding and experiences that school principals have of leadership which influence them to create learning environments that open up opportunities for learner success.

I will greatly appreciate it if you will permit me to interview you as well as request you to write a guided reflective journal on your experiences as a school leader. The interviews will be conducted for a period of 30 to 45 minutes and will be done after school hours. Where necessary, follow – up interviews will also be conducted to seek further clarification or additional information. The interviews will be tape – recorded with your permission.



The information you provide during interviews, your identity and that of your school, will be treated in the strictest confidence. The results of this research will be used for academic purposes only and the information will be published in the form of a thesis. Please rest assured that the highest standard of professional and ethical behaviour will be adhered to at all times. Your participation in this study is voluntary, and you are at liberty to withdraw from the project at any time if you feel that your position is being compromised.

Should you need any further information or clarification and wish to contact me or my supervisor please feel free to do so.

My supervisor, Prof. V. Chikoko can be contact on 031-260 2639 at the Faculty of Education, Edgewood Campus.

Thank you for your co - operation.

Yours sincerely

-----

✂ -----

Detach and Return

**Declaration**

I \_\_\_\_\_ (full names of participant) hereby confirm that I understand the contents of this document and the nature of this research project. I am willing to participate in this research project.

I understand that I reserve the right to withdraw from this project at any time.

Signature of participant:

\_\_\_\_\_

Date:

\_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX IV

### Section A: Personal and General Information

Please place a CROSS(X) in the appropriate box for each of the items below.

**A: Biographical Information**

Gender

Male	<input type="checkbox"/>		Female	<input type="checkbox"/>	
------	--------------------------	--	--------	--------------------------	--

Race:

African	<input type="checkbox"/>		Coloured	<input type="checkbox"/>		Indian	<input type="checkbox"/>		White	<input type="checkbox"/>	
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Age:

Below 20	<input type="checkbox"/>		21-30	<input type="checkbox"/>		31-40	<input type="checkbox"/>		41-50	<input type="checkbox"/>		51+	<input type="checkbox"/>	
----------	--------------------------	--	-------	--------------------------	--	-------	--------------------------	--	-------	--------------------------	--	-----	--------------------------	--

Formal Qualification :

M3 and below	<input type="checkbox"/>		M3-M4	<input type="checkbox"/>		M5+	<input type="checkbox"/>	
--------------	--------------------------	--	-------	--------------------------	--	-----	--------------------------	--

Years of teaching experience:

0-10years	<input type="checkbox"/>		11-20years	<input type="checkbox"/>		21-25years	<input type="checkbox"/>		25years+	<input type="checkbox"/>	
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Years of principal experience:

0-5years	<input type="checkbox"/>		6-10years	<input type="checkbox"/>		11-15years	<input type="checkbox"/>		16years+	<input type="checkbox"/>	
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**B.School Information:**

Learner Enrolment:

1-299	<input type="checkbox"/>		300-599	<input type="checkbox"/>		600+	<input type="checkbox"/>	
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School Type:

Primary	<input type="checkbox"/>		Secondary	<input type="checkbox"/>		Combited	<input type="checkbox"/>	
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Funding Status:

Section 20	<input type="checkbox"/>		Section 21	<input type="checkbox"/>		Private	<input type="checkbox"/>	
------------	--------------------------	--	------------	--------------------------	--	---------	--------------------------	--

Annual School Fees:

No	<input type="checkbox"/>		R1-499	<input type="checkbox"/>		R500-999	<input type="checkbox"/>		1000-1499	<input type="checkbox"/>		R1500+	<input type="checkbox"/>	
----	--------------------------	--	--------	--------------------------	--	----------	--------------------------	--	-----------	--------------------------	--	--------	--------------------------	--

Number of teachers, including management, in your school:

0-9	<input type="checkbox"/>		10-19	<input type="checkbox"/>		20-29	<input type="checkbox"/>		30-39	<input type="checkbox"/>		40+	<input type="checkbox"/>	
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**Section B: Individual in Depth Interview Guide for Principals**

1. Please tell me about your career experience, from the time you started teaching to where you are now.
2. What motivated you to become a teacher?
3. What is your understanding of the term “leadership”?
4. How would you define a “good” school principal in the current system?
5. What is your experience of your leadership in your school?
6. What are/were the most difficult challenges you have had to deal with presently in your position as principal?
7. When you have an important decision to make, how do you go about it?
8. Tell me about your experiences when decision making has not been successful.
9. Explain how you as principal transform your school into a learning environment for learner success?
10. In what way do you provide opportunities for your staff to develop to their fullest potential?

## APPENDIX 5

### Reflective Journal Writing- Guide for Principals

“Reflection is the key to getting meaning from your experience. Experience is not what happens to man; it is what a man does with what happens to him.” Aldous Huxley (1932)

1. Think of your interaction with staff and pupils. Reflect on an incident that evokes a pleasant/ happy experience.

(Please reflect on this and write about it. Below are some points to ponder)

NB: The length of your response is left to your discretion, as long as you have answered the question adequately.

- a. Describe your experience about this event.
- b. Why do you think you felt pleased about it?
- c. What input did you have in making this event/experience a success?
- d. What would you do in future to make this event even more successful?
- e. What did you learn from this experience?

2. Reflect on an incident where you had differences of opinion with colleagues and/or members of the school governing body.

(Please reflect on this and write about it. Below are some points to ponder)

NB: The length of your response is left to your discretion, as long as you have answered the question adequately.

- a. How did you feel about it?
- b. What steps did you take to address this incident
- c. What would you do differently in future to obviate a similar occurrence?
- d. How did this prove to be a learning experience for you?