



**TRANSFORMING SCHOOL CULTURE IN THE ERA OF
COVID-19: NARRATIVES OF PRIMARY SCHOOL
PRINCIPALS LEADING TOWNSHIP SCHOOLS**

by

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degree in the Discipline Educational Leadership, Management and
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KwaZulu-Natal


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DATE: NOVEMBER 2021

DECLARATION

I, Shahista Syed declare that:

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- ii. This dissertation has not been submitted for any other degree or examination at any other university.
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Signed: 

Student number: 219086788

Date: 30 November 2021

ETHICAL CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE



11 April 2021

Mrs Shahista Syed (219086788)
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Dear Mrs Syed,

Protocol reference number: HSSREC/00002619/2021
Project title: Transforming school culture in the era of Covid-19: Narratives of primary school principals leading township schools
Degree: Masters

Approval Notification – Expedited Application

This letter serves to notify you that your application received on 17 March 2021 in connection with the above, was reviewed by the Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (HSSREC) and the protocol has been granted FULL APPROVAL.

Any alteration/s to the approved research protocol i.e. Questionnaire/Interview Schedule, Informed Consent Form, Title of the Project, Location of the Study, Research Approach and Methods must be reviewed and approved through the amendment/modification prior to its implementation. In case you have further queries, please quote the above reference number. PLEASE NOTE: Research data should be securely stored in the discipline/department for a period of 5 years.

This approval is valid until 11 April 2022.

To ensure uninterrupted approval of this study beyond the approval expiry date, a progress report must be submitted to the Research Office on the appropriate form 2 - 3 months before the expiry date. A close-out report to be submitted when study is finished.

All research conducted during the COVID-19 period must adhere to the national and UKZN guidelines.

HSSREC is registered with the South African National Research Ethics Council (REC-040414-040).

Yours sincerely,



Professor Dipane Hlalele (Chair)

/dd

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INSPIRING GREATNESS

SUPERVISOR'S AUTHORISATION

This dissertation is submitted with my approval.



SUPERVISOR: PROFESSOR INBANATHAN NAICKER

DATE

DEDICATION

TO MY HUSBAND INTEYAZ AND MY SONS MIKAEEL, MAHIR AND AMAAN

MY FOREVER LOVES

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This amazing journey would not have been possible without my Lord and Saviour who has kept me in the palm of His hand throughout this and every stage of my life. Thank you, my Mighty God, for all You have blessed me with.

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Thank you all

ABSTRACT

Covid-19 brought on unprecedented changes to education and, more specifically, schools. School principals were left with the mammoth task of adapting how they led and managed schools during these unpredictable times. This qualitative study captures the narratives of two primary school principals transforming school culture in a township in South Africa. This study focuses on providing school leaders with successful real-life experiences that may equip them to change school culture during times of crises. The study aims to inform school principals about practices that may benefit those school leaders who are transforming school culture. The central research puzzle this study posed was: What are the lived experiences of primary school principals leading township schools in transforming school culture during the Covid-19 pandemic? The two sub-puzzles interrogate how school principals lead and manage the process of transforming school culture during the Covid-19 pandemic and why school principals lead and manage the transformation of school culture during the pandemic in the way they do. Transformational leadership theory and Handy's four types of organisational culture provide the lens for this study. Narrative inquiry as the methodology employed narrative interviews and collage inquiry to generate data. Data analysis comprised two levels: narrative analysis, which was used to construct the stories and analysis of narratives deconstructed the narratives to answer the research puzzle posed. The study's findings showed the strategies that school principals adopted, including changing leadership styles, drawing on leadership principles of motivation and collaboration, adopting power culture during a crisis period and school teams focusing on the task to transform school culture. Conclusions made in the study outline how transformational leadership, leaders' ability to manage; linking management with leadership; power culture; positive school culture and influence are driving forces during crisis periods. The recommendations that stemmed from this study encourage transformative agency among school teams, building on positive school cultural practices, developing technological skills, and learner-directed learning as practices for transforming school culture.

KEY WORDS: Covid-19, Narrative Inquiry, Primary Schools, School Culture, School Principals, Transformational Leadership

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

4IR: Fourth Industrial Revolution

NSNP: National School Nutrition Programme

PPE: Personal Protective Equipment

PIRLS: Progress in International Reading Literacy Study

PLC: Professional Learning Community

SASA: South African Schools Act

SARS: Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome

SOPs: Standard Operating Procedures

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CHAPTER ONE

CONTEXTUALISING THE STUDY: CONFRONTING THE LONG HAUL AHEAD WHILE FACING A NEW NORMAL IN SCHOOLS

1.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter I outline the background of my study then provide the problem statement and describe the purpose for this study. While looking at the rationale for this study I will outline the personal, professional and social rationale. This chapter will further unpack what the research puzzle is and define key concepts used in the research. In this study I have chosen to use Semino's (2020) #ReframedCovid to show the comparison of Covid-19 as running a marathon. At the outset of Covid-19 leaders alike around the globe chose to describe the pandemic using metaphors that denote fear and war terminology (Semino, 2020). Researchers like Semino (2020) set to change this by introducing the #ReframedCovid drive moving away from negative metaphors to more positive comparisons. It is from this perspective that I too choose to use a metaphor that compares Covid-19 in a more positive sense. Most people perceive Covid-19 as an unseen enemy that needs to be 'defeated' (Semino, 2020) and near impossible to do. I choose to use the metaphor of comparing this pandemic to a marathon that is gruelling and a challenge but with perseverance this race can be completed. Metaphors have been seen as tricky devices and even associated with threats in academic writing (Herrmann, 2013) as the dual meaning of metaphors may sometimes be misconstrued. From March 2020 Covid-19 has been viewed as a threat as well – an unseen enemy that mankind must face (Semino, 2020). Given this view of Covid-19 as a threat to 'normal life' and metaphors as threats to academic writing, I have chosen to link the two by presenting how both the disease and the use of metaphors are actually not threats but challenges that can be overcome to bring about 'a new normal'. Through this study I will present this metaphor of running a marathon that shows that the threat of Covid-19 is more a long haul ahead that must be faced and not a threat, but actually a new way of doing things at schools.

1.2 BACKGROUND

In 2020, countries across the world had to halt how economies and education systems operated when the World Health Organisation (WHO) declared the Coronavirus disease

(Covid-19) a worldwide pandemic (Van Bruwaene et al., 2020). On March 16, 2020, the President of the Republic of South Africa declared a national lockdown because of the Covid-19 pandemic, resulting in the closure of schools (Department of Basic Education, 2020). This was a historic moment for South African schools. Learners, teachers and school leaders had to brace themselves for unprecedented times over the coming months. Learning was brought to a complete standstill for millions of young people across the country (Mhlanga & Moloji, 2020). Several school leaders were able to keep the doors of learning open through remote learning via online platforms, but the greater majority had to develop other methods to face this new challenge (Mhlanga & Moloji, 2020). The Department of Basic Education (2020) introduced new Standard Operation Procedures (SOPs) to direct how teaching and learning should continue.

Culture has historically helped to define how members of an organisation like a school think and act (Narayan, 2016) and this culture helps organisations to cope during challenging times (Bowers, Hall & Srinivasen, 2017). Encouraging members of the school organisation to maintain commitment during a time of turbulence like a pandemic is an important attribute of positive organisational culture (Ahmad & Gelaidan, 2011) and this is built through a strong belief in the goals and values associated with the school. Without a desire to grow and transcend difficulties experienced, without leaders wanting to use challenges to change, people will remain the same. Crisis situations can provide the backdrop for renewed realisation of a need to change (Boonstra, 2013). The focus of this study is around principals who were able to transform their school culture during the time of Covid-19 and narrate their lived-experiences as leaders in primary schools. I have chosen to title my first chapter as such to show that Covid-19 forced principals into confronting a new normal, especially as there has been several criticisms of how schools operate over many years (Zhao, 2020).

1.3 PROBLEM STATEMENT

Covid-19 has impacted schooling globally (Azorin, 2020; Harris, 2020). Leaders in education have had to rethink how even the most basic practices can be restructured (Azorin, 2020). The leaders in schools are key to ensuring formal and informal culture (Turan & Bektas, 2013) and are used to strengthen the organisation during 'normal' times. Leaders have the ability to improve organisations, while strong leaders improve people (Turan &

Bektas, 2013). The outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic gave rise to multiple challenges in the South African education system (Sheikh et al., 2020; Van Bruwaene, et al., 2020).

Some of these challenges experienced at schools include the difficulty of distance learning for the majority of children, keeping children engaged in learning activities (Mhlanga & Moloji, 2020), feeding programmes, and staff shortages. These challenges further complicate the culture that school principals were already pursuing pre-Covid-19. This study sees principals as the main protagonists during this crisis time. What is missing now is the experiences of these primary school principals from township schools at a time of crisis which this study intends to provide. The problem that this study aims to address is to show through research that school culture can be transformed during periods of crisis. This study then provides an opportunity for repairing the leadership practices of principals during this crisis by highlighting their stories.

The purpose of this study is to hear the experiences of principals in primary schools and see this pandemic through their eyes, allowing other leaders to learn from it. This study will focus on how school principals in primary schools were able to transform their culture during the Covid-19 pandemic. Schooling in South Africa will not be the same after this turbulent period (Sheikh, et al., 2020). Leaving schools alone to figure this out will be catastrophic for the future of schooling in South Africa, where there are already major hurdles experienced by the majority of disadvantaged schools (Mhlanga & Moloji, 2020). The purpose of this study will be to narrate how principals used the challenge of Covid-19 to lead and manage their schools through transforming school culture.

1.3 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This study provides valuable findings through the narratives of the lived-experiences of primary school principals leading and managing the process of transforming school culture during challenging times. Data generated adds to the store of knowledge (Hox & Boeijs, 2005) that principals may use in practice when leading their schools during periods of crises. The implications of the theories used in this study inform practices for principals transforming school cultural change processes. This study also provides researchers with findings on real-life practices of principals which proved successful during the pandemic.

Policies introduced during the pandemic fulfilled the purpose of structuring direction for schools (Department of Basic Education, 2020) and the findings in this study seeks to inform policy makers on the effectiveness of those policies within the school sector.

1.5 RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY

In this section the personal, professional and social justification for the study is outlined (Clandinin, 2013).

1.5.1 PERSONAL

During my childhood years growing up in the Phoenix township, I was surrounded by different types of leaders in the community. Through my primary school and high school years I remember the principals who invoked fear with high levels of respect from both learners and teachers. I also remember meeting principals who showed compassion and took a keen interest in the lives of the children at the school as well as the wider community. This built an interest to understand how and why different leaders do things the way that they do. I saw principals as the link that joins school to the community and society.

1.5.2 PROFESSIONAL

As a teacher working in a primary school during the time of Covid-19, I saw the magnitude to which it impacted our lives. Schools had to stop teaching and learning, some for short periods, the majority for longer (Zhao, 2020). Some principals in the Phoenix township similar to other schools around the globe, used this time to revisit and restructure how schools operated (Harris, 2020; Zhao, 2020). As a teacher involved via varying leadership roles, I also noted how schools are seen as sub-cultures of the society they exist in (Turan & Bektas, 2013) which is reflected sometimes in the school culture adopted. School leaders however, are the drivers of the school culture and may inject positive practices in schools (Turan & Bektas, 2013) even during difficult times. I have noted that if school principals are able to model the school culture, subordinates are more willing to action the goals and objectives of the school (Turan & Bektas, 2013). During this period of uncertainty, I have also noted the increased level of responsibility placed on the shoulders of principals to lead and manage the

culture of teaching and learning effectively. In order to gain insight into how they effectively led schools, transformed its culture, a study of their lived-experiences is imperative.

1.5.3 SOCIAL

Studies conducted during 2020 show a majority of principals at primary schools were overwhelmed during Covid-19 (O'Brien, 2020). O'Brein's (2020) study also suggests professional development opportunities are needed for training principals on leadership crisis management for future situations. Through this development principals may influence peers through motivation, trust and commitment (Ahmed & Gelaidan, 2011). My study aims to show the struggle experienced by leaders at schools during the pandemic and how their lived-experiences may impact other principals by motivating those principals in this way increasing trust and commitment in themselves.

1.6 RESEARCH PUZZLE

A research puzzle is similar to a research question but requires closer explanation of why certain things happen despite other conditions (Gustafsson & Hagström, 2018). Through the research puzzle, this study will ask important questions on why principals did the things they did while other conditions like transforming school culture during a pandemic existed.

1.6.1 MAIN PUZZLE

What are the lived experiences of primary school principals leading township schools in transforming school culture during the Covid-19 pandemic?

1.6.2 SUB-PUZZLE

1. How do school principals lead and manage the process of transforming school culture during the Covid-19 pandemic? (This question seeks to explain the way in which primary school principals led their schools during Covid-19 on a daily basis, describing what were the previous practices and then changed practices during this period. It provides perspective showing their evolving role on a daily basis during this time.)

2. Why do school principals lead and manage the transformation of school culture during the Covid-19 pandemic in the way they do? (In this question focus is placed on the circumstances

encouraging principals to lead and manage their schools during this crisis. It determines factors either professionally or personally that propelled them in the direction they took.)

1.7 DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS

This study draws on five key concepts: Leadership, Management, The relationship between leadership and management, School culture and Township schools.

1.7.1 LEADERSHIP

Leadership is seen as one person exerting influence over others toward a common goal, with a tendency to reflect personal and professional values (Bush, 2008; Northouse, 2013). Leadership encourages capacity building through shared collaborative processes (Harris & Jones, 2020). Leadership has become an extremely valued asset (Northouse, 2013) more especially in schools and the key component of leadership this study focuses on is its influence. In this study leadership is defined through the strong asset principals are. The strong influence they hold over their subordinates in order to work in unity toward a common purpose (Bush, 2008).

1.7.2 MANAGEMENT

Management is defined as the process of getting people to work together toward a common purpose (Bush, 2008; Botha, 2013). For school management to be effective there needs to be a relationship between aims, performance and the plans of the school (Bush, 2008). Management similar to leadership involves influence (Northouse, 2013) as principals leverage their influence over subordinates ensuring collaboration in attaining plans set forth. Management focuses on the processes (Bush, 2008) that principals introduced in order to establish collaboration between staff ensuring a pursuit of the common goals set.

1.7.3 THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

There is a clear link or overlapping between management and leadership (Bush, 2008). While leadership is about motivating and entrusting staff, management is about getting people to get

the job done (Chikoko et al., 2015). Leadership focuses on helping and changing subordinates while management builds character and encourages action (Bush, 2008; Chikoko et al., 2015). Through this study I will highlight this strong link between leadership and management to overcome challenges faced during the pandemic.

1.7.4 SCHOOL CULTURE

School culture is defined as the conveying of meaning through norms, values, beliefs, ceremonies, rituals, traditions, and myths through people within the school as an organisation (Stolp & Smith, 1994; Turan & Bektas, 2013). This practice develops what people think and how they act (Taahyadin & Daud, 2018). School culture helps provide principals with a structure for interpreting difficult issues and relationships (MacNeil et al., 2009) which this study aims to underscore. School culture may provide principals with a guide on how schools take on the challenge of the pandemic by providing structure (MacNeil et al., 2009) to how schools will handle the new normal.

1.7.5 TOWNSHIP SCHOOLS

Township schools in South Africa are the result of segregation due to apartheid legislation (Mahaye, 2020; Zulu et al., 2019). Township schools are characterised by high levels of violence, poverty, absent parents, overcrowded classrooms and lack of resources (Mahaye, 2020; Zulu, Bhengu & Mkhize, 2019). This study places township schools as the backdrop providing a sense of setting and highlighting the challenges faced by principals in these schools, while trying to lead and manage building a positive culture.

1.8 OVERVIEW OF THE CHAPTERS

To draw from my metaphor of Covid-19 seen as a marathon, the chapters in this study are outlined through the eyes of an athlete facing their first marathon and knowing in the end there is a silver lining!

Chapter One titled ‘Confronting the long haul ahead while facing the new normal in schools’, starts the excitement associated with entering the first marathon. It introduces the study and gives the background. It also provides the problem statement, purpose, significance, rationale

and research puzzle. The final stages of Chapter One of this ‘marathon’ ends with the definition of key concepts used in the study as well as an overview of the chapters.

Chapter Two titled ‘Seeing the world through nervous eyes’ draws on the review of existing literature available as we also discuss the two key theories presented. It is referred to as ‘nervous eyes’ since the marathon enters an integral stage where the thoughts of researchers are now the focus. The themes set in this chapter aim to set the ‘plot’ as the narrative begins to unfold. The theories of transformational leadership and Handy’s four types of organisational culture provide the lens through which the study is presented.

Chapter Three is titled ‘It starts to get real’ since the study now focuses on the research design and methodology used in the study. Here the research paradigm provides the reader with the guideline for the methodology employed, which in this study is critical theory. The methodology used is narrative inquiry. It also outlines the justification for the choice of narrative inquiry and details data generation methods which include narrative interviews and collage inquiry. The chapter then presents the two levels of data analysis utilised, which were narrative analysis and analysis of narratives.

Chapter Four is titled ‘The middle miles’ brings together the narratives of the two principals acquired through narrative interviews and collage inquiry. The narratives provide the opportunity for the participants to share their lived-experiences by telling their stories. The participants trace back their steps to share their lives prior to the pandemic, during the pandemic and later their hopes for what lies ahead. They draw on their collages to provide a visual account of their experiences.

Chapter Five which is the crux of this study, is titled ‘Clawing through a new path’ and offers an analysis of the narratives in response to the research puzzle. Through the lens of the two theories identified in chapter two, the themes that emerged during the analysis of narratives is uncovered. These key themes guide the analysis process in order to interpret the narratives presented. The analysis is presented through storyboarding and visual mapping.

Chapter Six is titled ‘Finding the silver lining’ as it places the study into perspective by providing a summary of each chapter, identifying the conclusions that were drawn from the study, presents my reflections as well as recommendations going forward. This chapter brings the journey to a conclusion by allowing the researcher to share the lessons learnt and mapping a way forward.

1.9 CONCLUSION

In Chapter One the study was introduced to readers, providing a background and setting the scene through the purpose and rationale of the study. It uncovered important levels in the marathon through presentation of the significance and drawing on the research puzzle. This chapter also introduced the key terminology of this study and how it relates to the study. Chapter One introduced the analogy of seeing Covid-19 not as an enemy but as something that can be overcome in time, something that if principals’ pace themselves, they will be able to overcome, change and improve how things are done at schools. The central message in this chapter is that Covid-19 is a new normal that schools face and principals through utilising school culture influence how schools are led and managed through the pandemic. Chapter Two relates to ‘Seeing the world through nervous eyes’, as we review what literature has to say about this fairly new phenomenon of Covid-19 in schools.

CHAPTER TWO

SEEING THE WORLD THROUGH NERVOUS EYES:

DECIPHERING RELATED LITERATURE AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS DURING UNFAMILIAR TIMES

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The first chapter introduced the background, problem statement, rationale, research puzzle, significance and some key concepts used in the study. I have titled this chapter ‘Seeing the world through nervous eyes’ to review and decipher the experiences of researchers who themselves are finding their way through Covid-19, a phenomenon that is unknown to the world as a whole. Key stakeholders including department officials, principals and community members were seeing Covid-19 as an enemy; however, Azorin (2020), Harris (2020), Zhao (2020) among others saw the pandemic as an opportunity for something positive. The ‘nervous eyes’ are the eyes of the world upon these researchers who were being watched closely and critically as they mostly drew on the positives of the pandemic. This chapter is divided into two parts. Part one provides a review of related literature available on the topic. Themes that have been selected in the literature review provide the narrative for this study and are set under the following seven themes: The Covid-19 pandemic and schools, School principals as leaders in the 21st century, School leadership in times of crisis, School leadership and the Covid-19 pandemic, School leadership and social justice, School principals and the Covid-19 pandemic, School leadership and school culture. I have chosen these themes to provide direction for the narrative of this study by showing how different researchers looked at key areas relating to Covid-19, leadership and schooling. Part two is a review of the two key theories used in this study. The two theories are: Transformational leadership and Charles Handy’s four types of organisational culture.

2.2 PART ONE – REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

This part of Chapter Two provides an insight into how researchers viewed the pandemic through key themes. The themes selected will allow me to provide a description as to how educational leaders, school leaders, principals and school communities within the education sector viewed the pandemic.

2.2.1 THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC AND SCHOOLS

The Covid-19 pandemic has most certainly resulted in focusing on the holes that exist in South Africa's education system. Twenty-four years after introducing the South African Schools Act, 84 of 1996 the smoke screen created to hide the reality of schooling was lifted. The lack of educational resources and poor condition of many historically disadvantaged schools in South Africa (Amnesty International, 2021a; Du Plessis & Mestry, 2019; Naicker & Chikoko, 2021) were further exposed. The Covid-19 pandemic had further exacerbated the inequalities between schools in South Africa and widened the divide created by the apartheid legacy (Amnesty International, 2021a). The bleak picture of the state of education in rural areas reflected that in some ways Covid-19 has all but ended the education of many learners in rural areas. On a positive note, however, this exposure through Covid-19 also presented opportunities to rethink what improvements can be made in education especially in these disadvantaged schools (Zhao, 2020).

The unprecedented opportunity that Covid-19 has presented to education must not be overlooked. Pre-Covid-19 schools traditionally followed certain leadership practices and styles (Harris, 2020) so schools may use this opportunity to assess those practices and remediate existing processes. Harris (2020), Zhao (2020) and Azorin (2020) interrogate the possibilities the pandemic provided early on as their research was conducted during the initial months of Covid-19. While Harris (2020) speaks of using this period to identify leadership styles that inculcate collaborative work, engaging collective action, Zhao (2020) and Azorin (2020) speak of using the crisis to reimagine education by looking at what, how and where changes can be made. While one researcher pursues ideas of leadership styles being restructured (Harris, 2020) the other speaks of schooling systems being refocused on curriculum, reviewing what, how and where learners learn (Zhao, 2020) and the role school leaders play in revisiting traditional practices. The opportunities provided by the pandemic cannot be ignored, especially in how leadership practices determined how schools dealt with the pandemic.

To evaluate the effects of the pandemic, researchers like Azorin (2020) delved into the unknown field of Covid-19. She based her study on highlighting the poor condition of Spanish education during the pandemic. During my review it became difficult to ignore the similarities to South African schools outlined in her study. The poor state of education in certain areas of Spain were similar to the conditions in many under-resourced schools in

South Africa. The study by Azorin (2020) proposed leaders and policymakers use this time wisely which is similar to the views expressed by Harris (2020). It is heartening to note these researchers advocating for using this negative situation towards positive changes. I share Azorin's hope for using this crisis to the maximum by reviewing conditions in education and in this way "not leave anyone behind". The challenges that present itself at this stage are viewed by many as temporary and while some school leaders are looking at short term fixes to ride the wave, (Zhao, 2020) others are viewing this challenge as a window to bring about changes.

Schooling has always been driven by curriculum dictated by government legislation so schools are vehicles of implementation only (Zhao, 2020). This interruption to 'normal' schooling provides opportunities to weigh the benefits of existing policy against alternate methods. It opens doors to changing what constitutes a learning environment, especially as Covid-19 has forced the use of varied platforms for learning (Hargreaves, 2020; Zhao, 2020) incorporating or combining even remote learning and physical school (Gurr & Drysdale, 2020). By Azorin (2020) interrogating how, what and where learners learn, she was able to provide an analysis of how change in education can be revived to move away from the traditional approaches that have dominated schooling for a long time now. Researchers seem to be hopeful that governments sought to dictate policies on education would now involve other stakeholders who have tried various approaches during this pandemic and now incorporate them into schools.

Key components to determining success of education systems is through assessment programmes like examinations (Ehrin & Chapman, 2020). This interruption of conventional year-end evaluations and examinations has now provided a chance to look at the reality of how and why assessments are conducted. There is an expectation now that school leaders will re-evaluate the examination and assessment systems used (Upoalkpajor & Upoalkpajor, 2020; Zhao, 2020). Forcing children to fit into categories that they may not necessarily want to follow can now be restructured according to what the new school culture hopes to create. This period will require leaders who will be able to balance curriculum, evaluations and development of teaching and learning processes (Gurr & Drysdale, 2020). It is hard to ignore that most articles I reviewed show researchers focusing on the positives of this pandemic.

The pandemic has provided opportunities to embrace change in how learners are assessed and that examinations may not be the only benchmark to evaluating learner performance.

2.2.2 SCHOOL PRINCIPALS AS LEADERS IN THE 21ST CENTURY

Effective school leaders leading schools into the 21st century need to see the critical role of moving away from conventional leadership practices and drive schools to become places that encourage creativity, innovation and collaborative work (Dess & Picken, 2012; McNulty, 2018). Driscoll (2021) illuminates what is still needed in 21st century leadership which Dess, Picken (2012) and McNulty (2018) have been pushing for: innovative teams that inspire educational possibilities. Dess and Picken (2012) drew this picture of the changing demands on leaders almost a decade ago. Schools wanting to be relevant in the coming years have to adapt to leadership that requires principals to empower and collaborate with intelligent and creative teams (Driscoll, 2021). Fisher and Waller (2013) take an interesting view of principals' readiness for 21st century leadership further by highlighting through their quantitative study of 328 principals, the importance of principals' technological knowledge and skills. These researchers bring to the surface the lack of technological knowledge as a prerequisite to holding leadership positions which may result in poor leadership as a contributing factor to holding schools back (Naicker & Chikoko, 2021). Digital prowess becomes very significant if leaders like principals want to remain relevant in the current digital era overtaking all spheres of education.

Educational leaders and school communities that value leadership aimed at futuristic development will see the value of technological knowledge and include this when placing principals at the helm of schools. 21st century leaders cannot encourage 21st century learning without modelling technological skills in their own interactions with the school community (Fisher & Waller, 2013). This may also assist with addressing the poor state of leadership at many under resourced South African public schools (Naicker & Chikoko, 2021). Principals who have limited or no technological knowhow struggle to transition from conventional practices to adopt varied technological practices that may enhance teaching and learning. While some schools maybe disadvantaged by structural inequalities, leadership practices in many schools further deprive schools (Naicker & Chikoko, 2021) of taking the plunge into 21st century learning.

The main goal driving education across the world in the last few years is preparation for 21st century learning through the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR). South Africa it seems is still playing catch-up as digital technology has not reached the greater majority of South African schools (Amnesty International, 2021b; McNulty, 2018). The vast majority of global schools are building skill sets to adapt to the digital revolution with McNulty (2018) identifying technology and media skills as imperative to remaining relevant in the new digital era revolutionising education. Other skill sets needed to adapt to 21st century learning include critical thinking, problem-solving and creativity which the current curriculum incorporates (Department of Basic Education, 2011). South Africa must monopolise on the benefits of digital tools revolutionising global schooling. The benefits of using digital learning include helping learners make learning personalised, expanded and collaborative among other changes (McNulty, 2018).

The difficulty principals face in bringing in digital learning could not be more evident than during the Covid-19 pandemic where many schools globally were able to quickly transition toward online teaching and learning (Brelsford et al., 2020; O' Connel & Clark, 2020; Ho & Tay, 2020; Sato, 2020). Schools in Nigeria for example were able to introduce broadband learning through television and radio programmes and later to move to online learning (Oyeniran & Oyeniran, 2020) in certain sectors of schools. Although Nigeria faces issues of electricity shortages, attempts were made to bring online learning to learners across spheres (Igbokwe et al., 2020; Oyeniran & Oyeniran, 2020). In South Africa mostly previously minority, advantaged schools were able to fully transition to online learning (Amnesty International, 2021a) leaving the majority of learners in the dark.

2.2.3 SCHOOL LEADERSHIP IN TIMES OF CRISIS

Research conducted on leadership competencies during periods of crisis at the early onset of the pandemic noted certain leadership practices that were successful to include: inspiring a shared vision, identifying opportunities, encouraging collaboration and highlighting contributions (Dirani et al., 2020). The principal's leadership attributes come to the fore during crises. These leadership practices are most certainly seen in transformational leaders (Northouse, 2013; Singh & Lokotsch, 2005). The manner in which members of organisations respond to crisis situations vary from chaos to well-structured, determined organised

resoluteness (Bowers et al., 2017). The way forward selected by leaders during crisis is greatly dependent on the existing organisational culture. The role of leaders is to identify crisis solutions rapidly and effectively. Crisis situations happen over a period of time and it is important for leaders to identify signs and prepare for them by interpreting the existing culture and identifying the right person (Bowers et al., 2017) to lead the organisation through the crisis.

Organisations have a better chance of recovering after a crisis under the direction of leaders who are able to navigate through challenging times (Bowers et al., 2017). Leadership style directs how organisations cope during crisis since all leaders are not fitted to lead during challenging times (Bowers et al., 2017). Brelsford et al., (2020) corroborate this in their study when they express how certain principals were able to reach out to staff and the school community through transparent communication, while other principals alienated teachers by showing disregard for their professionalism. This then shows that leaders who motivate followers to work toward a common purpose are able to navigate organisations through challenges (Bowers et al., 2017). Therefore, this period may require leaders who are able to encourage effective planning/implementation, a collaborative culture and teamwork (Singh & Lokotsch, 2005) to lead effectively during this period. It is imperative that leaders provide clear direction to their subordinates during this period.

It is interesting to note that Dirani et al's., (2020) research focused on leadership competencies and human resources by highlighting the important role of the leader's ability to communicate with subordinates during this period. Leaders must be able to remain aware of the needs and impact of the challenge on staff. They also need to be able to lay forward plans and objectives clearly so that stakeholders feel engaged in the processes transpiring. This period allows for strategic, flexible, and determined leaders to succeed (Dirani et al., 2020) however, these leaders must not lose sight of the culture they intend building, inclusive of all stakeholders. Leaders building power or task cultures as outlined in Charles Handy's theory (1993) could help strengthen their organisations since power cultures are best suited to handling threats while task cultures help the principal and team focus on the tasks at hand.

The way leaders treat subordinates during crisis is significant (Tran et al., 2020) to how organisations rode the storm of in times of a crisis. Principals who focus only on student needs at the expense of staff and how they are dealing with the crisis, may create increasing difficulties. The leader who is able to be people-centred (Gurr, 2014) and support teachers

and other staff while steering through this challenging time is essential. The contrasting styles of school leaders in school districts in Texas highlighted by Brelsford et al., (2020) placed the spotlight on the significant role school leaders played in providing support, mentoring and training. While some principals took into account staff mental and physical well-being, others maintained unrealistic expectations of subordinates. Studies in Cyprus and Nigeria reported similar experiences (Igbokwe et al., 2020; Kafa & Parshiardis, 2020). School principals need to support staff and learners not only through professional and academic development processes during times of crisis (Tran et al., 2020), but through mental health checks as well as learner and personnel safety. It is important that principals humanise schools by moving away from top-down leadership actions and treat staff with respect and as professionals (Breslford et al., 2020; Tran et al., 2020).

Leaders who are able to have monitoring systems in order to identify crisis even before they occur, give organisations an advantage (Middlehurst, 2010). This allows the organisation to put into place plans/strategies to deal with challenges faced. Transparency with subordinates and communication with the relevant stakeholders in order to gain their support is also essential during times of crisis (Dirani et al., 2020; Middlehurst, 2010). Transformational principals focus on organisational change at varying levels, stimulate and engage with staff to achieve success (Middlehurst, 2010). These principals provide opportunities to develop, collaborate and inspire subordinates. This form of progressive leadership enables organisations like schools to survive crisis situations.

The idea of collective capacity in school with effective leadership strengthens it as an organisation (Jones & Harris, 2013). The study by Jones and Harris (2013) looked at principals, teachers and other stakeholders working together to bring about positive change. This collaborative opportunity to get role players to work collectively toward learning new skills, supporting each other and taking responsibility has to be driven by principals (Al-Ali et al., 2017; Jones & Harris, 2013) in order for it to be successful especially during times of change. This collaboration brings forward the importance of a task culture ensuring role players work together (Handy, 1993). Collectively addressing issues will ensure all role players take collective responsibility. The important role of professional learning communities (PLCs) cannot be ignored when building collective responsibility.

2.2.4 SCHOOL LEADERSHIP AND THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Managing organisations during crisis like Covid-19 require leaders to have foresight, be flexible, empathetic and provide support (Dirani et al., 2020). This period requires leaders who are creative, dynamic, inventive and spirited (Dirani et al., 2020) in order to endure this trying period. During and post Covid-19 school leadership has to become more linked, visionary, collective and conscious (Harris & Jones, 2020). Leadership practices principals engage in will have to be geared toward crisis and change management (Harris & Jones, 2020) as Covid-19 will certainly not be the last epidemic that schools will face (Upoalkpajor & Upoalkpajor, 2020). Leading schools requires amenable leaders that are flexible (Gurr & Drysdale, 2020) as opportunities for change present themselves during these unpredictable times. Changes those leaders hope to make will have long term effects on prevailing cultures of schools. As leaders who are responsive to change realise the opportunity school culture provides.

Futuristic leadership that does not ignore experiences from the past, strengthen organisations (Gurr & Drysdale, 2020). This is due to decisive action that may need to be taken by school leaders, and the consequences of these actions must not be ignored (Gurr & Drysdale, 2020; Harris & Jones, 2020) as this may be the result of past experiences. These researchers refer to leaders who offer long term direction to schools in order to face unprecedented times. An example of this type of leadership, is cited in Gurr and Drysdale (2020) where leaders who were able to plan for situations of remote learning in combination with physical learning well before Covid-19 appeared. These ideas were seen as extreme when suggested however, a great majority of schools are now implementing this type of schooling. It is this type of foresight that transformational principals must envision.

Leaders need to act courageously by taking risks and acting briskly (Gurr & Drysdale, 2020; Harris & Jones 2020). These leaders will have to recognise the importance of receptive direction in managing schools during this period. School leaders need to promote and encourage new ideas and programmes that steer them through this period (Gurr & Drysdale, 2020; Harris & Jones 2020). School leaders and subordinates must be aware of varying trends in technology driving education presently. Most training programmes used by principals will have to be reviewed (Harris & Jones, 2020) as some current programmes are viewed as

outdated and they should not be afraid of incorporating new methods and technological advancements.

2.2.5. SCHOOL PRINCIPALS AND COVID-19

As already noted in this study Covid-19 affected schooling throughout the world. O’Connel and Clarke (2020) among other studies present a ‘mild’ reflexive commentary of the experiences of a principal in a long-standing school in Australia set in the context of a privileged environment. I refer to it as ‘mild’ since the commentary expresses the ‘tall’ ask made upon principals during this difficult period focused more on emotional challenges. Further afield Ahlstrom et al., (2020) provide perspective on the experiences of Swedish principals in dealing with the pandemic in what we term a first world environment. These principals reflect on the set of new challenges they encountered in leading their schools amongst a backdrop of uncertainty, distance learning and high absentee rates being their key concerns. Studies in Singapore for example, reflect schools were better equipped to deal with the introduction of online learning as they had previously experienced school closures due to epidemics like severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) (Ho & Tay, 2020) and had therefore invested in technological improvements to schooling. The comparison here that I would like to draw on is that although principals across the globe were greatly affected, these principals were still able to adapt their schools to create a new normal in an environment of privilege. Township schools, however which is the focus in this study, had pre-existing challenges which included lack of basic resources which was further complicated by Covid-19.

Leading schools, especially in townships in South Africa present a complex and difficult context for principals (Zulu et al., 2019). These principals lead schools categorised by high levels of poverty, poor learner academic performance, poor discipline and demotivated teachers among other challenges (Amnesty International, 2020; Zulu et al., 2019). The challenge of leading schools in this context during a pandemic that shook all schools around the globe, highlights the near impossible task faced by principals in townships. While schools highlighted in O’Connel and Clark (2020), Ahlstrom et al., (2020) faced hurdles, township schools in South Africa faced mountains in their marathon. These principals in township schools are burdened with lack of basic amenities like access to basic resources (Zulu et al., 2019) but had to now develop strategies to keep learners and educators engaged in some form of learning and teaching.

Principals in schools around the globe scrambled to develop plans to introduce online teaching and learning (Ho & Tay, 2020; Sato, 2020; Igbokwe et al., 2020). While schools in Japan, India, Singapore and even Nigeria were able to move to some form of online learning platforms (Ho & Tay, 2020; Igbokwe et al., 2020; Sato, 2020) 463 million children had no access to remote learning globally (Amnesty International, 2021a). In South Africa only 10% of learners had access to internet connections (Amnesty International, 2021a) making the task of principals to introduce online learning impossible in majority of schools. With township schools riddled with issues of poverty, vandalism, burglaries (Zulu et al., 2019), introducing online learning was a near impossibility.

2.2.6 SCHOOL LEADERSHIP AND SOCIAL JUSTICE IN TIMES OF CRISIS

Social justice in education indicates a responsibility to challenging social, cultural and economic diversity (Griffiths, 2003; Vigliante, 2007). Educational goals focus on edifying the mind and transforming society, in democratic societies the goal is further engrossed in providing equitable rights to education (Ayers et al., 2009) through school leadership. In the goal of creating competitive schooling, school leaders have oftentimes forgotten the true purpose of education: to create strong, imaginative and morally bound adults that are able to bring value to the societies they exist in (Ayers et al., 2009). It would not be incorrect to say that some school leaders have contributed to South Africa being decades away from meeting the goal of equitable education to the vast majority of South African township and especially rural children. The divide that has existed for decades in these schools has now been further widened by the pandemic (Naicker & Chikoko, 2021) with Covid-19 exposing the injustice in public education. South African schooling is still very divided with the mix of developed and developing schools (Amnesty International, 2021b; Naicker & Chikoko, 2021). Privileged schools which are predominantly white schools (Naicker & Chikoko, 2021) often headed by futuristic school leadership, similar to schools in first world and developing countries were able to make the transition to online learning. A great majority of South African learners, who are predominantly from black under resourced schools, (Naicker & Chikoko, 2021) had little hope of making this transition since only 22% of households had access to computers (Amnesty International, 2021a). This was against the ‘pipe-dream’ promised to South African citizens by government’s target of 90% of all South Africans to have

internet access by 2020 (Amnesty International, 2021a). To put more aptly my thoughts on this is captured by Ayers et al. (2009) of what the situation currently feels like in township schools: “too much dreaming and not enough doing” (p. xiv.)

The closure of schools during Covid-19 did not just deny disadvantaged learners’ access to education but food as well. Thirty-five million children globally depend on school nutrition programmes (Masonbrink & Hurley, 2020). Poor communities where learners usually receive meals at school were now left starving. Countries with strong school leaders, like the United States of America for example, were able to address the issue of access to food during hybrid learning. School leaders speedily introduced innovative programmes where families were able to access funding for meals (Poole et al., 2021) and also rapidly set up distribution points on school routes for families to access food (Kinsey et al., 2021). In South Africa the National School Nutrition Programme (NSNP) had prior to Covid-19 began to make inroads into addressing hunger among school children. NSNP provided food to 80% of learners at schools (Gustafsson & Deliwe, 2020) in order to address the social divide that existed for decades. With the onset of the national lockdown these children were not able to access their meals (Molelekwa, 2020). Children could easily deal with using older books as well as an absence of educators but not without food. School leaders through the NSNP had to swiftly adapt procedures in order to address the situation of child hunger through the setting up of food distribution drives, including 300 mobile kitchens (Duma, 2020) when schools were allowed to reopen.

2.2.7 SCHOOL LEADERSHIP AND SCHOOL CULTURE

The culture of organisations includes implicit expectations held by members within it. So, what then is culture? Culture is defined as “learned beliefs, values, norms, symbols, and traditions that are common to a group of people” (Northouse, 2013, p. 384). It is combined practices of organisations that make them exclusive. Narayan (2016) and Bowers et al., (2020) outline the important role culture plays in managing organisations like schools. While Narayan (2016) explicitly focuses on school culture as an improvement tool to driving positive improvement, Bowers et al., (2017) focuses on how the culture determines the leader’s actions during a crisis. These important viewpoints of culture combine to express the role of leadership and school culture. Both researchers further agree that having a positive culture is possible through leadership. This view is shared by Nieman and Kotze (2006) who

outline explicit links between culture of schools and its cultivation by leaders. These researchers are of the view that principals who are able to strengthen a positive school culture where staff work seamlessly, allow teaching and learning to thrive.

Empirical studies conducted by researchers in Cyprus (Kyriakides & Pashiasrdis, 2010) and the United Arab Emirates (Al-Ali et al., 2017) identified that culture influences factors including, organisational performance as culture is an integral element in improvement. Organisational performance is in turn influenced by leadership style (Bowers et al., 2017) through existent organisational culture. These studies were conducted in countries with contrasting socio-economic conditions, however, they both validate the influence of culture on organisations. Other researchers like Narayan (2016), Bowers et al., (2017) and Ahmed and Gelaidan (2011) also concur on the role of leaders who encourage and influence the culture of schools. Principals therefore become role models of the school culture which teachers begin to emulate in their practices. But in certain instances, organisations fail in change efforts like cultural change because people within organisations are not committed to change (Ahmad & Gelaidan, 2011; Al-Ali et al., 2017). It is important then for principals to be aware of their role in driving the culture of their schools more especially in developing contexts like South African township schools. Principals in these contexts need to guard against developing certain cultures including person culture but rather focus on building collaborative cultures, since person culture puts the needs of individuals before organisations as expressed in Handy's organisational culture theory (1993) which may become prevalent in schooling systems that are still developing similar to South Africa.

Organisational culture that is open to change is more successful as organisational culture that is embedded is difficult to change (Bowers et al., 2017) since it guides how members of organisations think and act (Narayan, 2016). This could not be clearer during the Covid-19 period whereby schools with cultures open to change were more able to adapt to the new SOPs. These schools were able to amend rules and regulations in order to create safer Covid-19 compliant schools. It is clear then those prevailing cultures determine successes and failures of organisations as it shapes the relationship between the organisation and its members (Bowers et al., 2017). Leaders also play an integral role in influencing subordinates' commitment to the development of positive changes (Ahmad & Gelaiden, 2011) and this influenced schools during the pandemic.

The culture of an organisation serves many functions but since this study looks at its strengths in reshaping the school during challenging times, let us outline selected functions as highlighted by Tsang (2009): it binds the organisation, directs actions and helps keep the organisation together. Leaders who are able to build on these functions, more specifically during crisis times, will most certainly be able to direct their schools confidently as culture is shaped through planning, systems, people and practice (Turan & Bektas, 2013). Although school culture maybe imbedded in members as stated, good leaders can change people through developing positive cultures (Nieman & Kotze, 2006; Turan & Bektas, 2013) and it is leaders that are able to take organisations through times of crisis (Bowers et al., 2017). Some principals were able to adapt and change cultural practices at their schools during Covid-19, by displaying sincerity, trust and clarity; these leaders saw this challenge as something to be overcome (Gurr, 2014). Leaders need to be able to see that the existing culture may need to be changed during crisis times (Boonstra, 2013). As previously stated by Zhao (2020) and Harris (2020) difficulties should be used as springboards for implementing changes in structure and even culture (Boonstra, 2013) to strengthen school organisations. This may require formulating new plans (visions) for the future and setting approaches to be taken to manage crisis situations (Boonstra, 2013) in collaboration with stakeholders.

South African education has been defined by positive and negative cultures. Due to the existence of a dual public education system in South African schools as a result of the apartheid system (Naicker & Chikoko, 2021), some schools have positive cultures and others are defined by negative cultures (Zulu et al., 2004). Factors that impede positive cultures include: overcrowded classrooms, violence, poverty and other social ills (Zulu et al., 2004). The existence of a culture of violence that dominates many township schools further hampers the creation of a positive culture and affects the morale of teachers and learners (Zulu et al., 2004). The existence of this type of negative culture further deprived learners at many schools during Covid-19. Schools were vandalised during this period, creating additional complications for school communities attempting to renew a positive culture.

South African education has encouraged a culture that keeps teaching and learning restricted to the classroom. Teaching and learning have not advocated for a culture that encourages learner-directed learning (Naicker & Chikoko, 2021). This became very evident when learners had to transition during the Covid-19 period to remote learning. Teacher and learner dependence on teacher-directed learning came under the spotlight. During this period in education where leaders are establishing new cultures at schools, self-learning needs to be a

school culture firmly established (Naicker & Chikoko, 2021). Schools that transitioned to online and remote learning showed the need for learning to become more self-directed in order for learners to face the new norm of education.

2.3 PART TWO: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In part two I draw on the two theories to provide insight into understanding the phenomena in this study. The two theories in this study are: Transformational Leadership and Handy's four types of organisational culture.

2.3.1 TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP

In this section I provide justification for the theory, unpack the theory and explain how I deploy the theory.

2.3.1.1 JUSTIFICATION

The use of the transformational leadership theory will allow me as researcher to advocate that transformational leaders are the best type of leaders during a crisis period. Through the review of this leadership theory, this study will show how transformational leaders are able to influence others to perform their duties to their full potential which is essential during challenging times like a pandemic. Northouse's (2013) description of a transformational leader using impassioned pleas and encouraging collaborative work, was key to the success of schools during Covid-19. I see this type of leader spurring followers to be more creative and even challenge themselves which principals were actively engaged in doing during the Covid-19 period (Ahlstrom et al., 2020; O'Connell & Clarke, 2020).

2.3.1.2 UNPACKING THE THEORY

Burns (1978) transformational leadership theory sees transformational leadership as a process where, leaders and followers motivate and inspire each other to higher levels of morality. Burns saw leaders drawing on their leadership to: establish vision; empower followers; encourage and develop followers to change their capabilities and challenge the existing culture in order to become catalysts for change. He further perpetuated for leadership to create change whereby the concept of leader and follower merges but in certain specific

circumstances only. Burns also established that transformational leaders develop their leadership capabilities by establishing trust relationships with their followers and thereby support the leader through loyalty.

During times of crisis true leaders emerge based on their ability to manage their followers effectively. These transformational leaders have to endeavour to keep their subordinates motivated to become innovative and creative (Jyoti & Bhau, 2015) but also balance concern for their individual personal and work challenges. Burns' (1978) view of empowering subordinates helps to build an environment that supports followers through participative decision making (Jyoti & Bhau, 2015). This type of leadership provides the fortitude required in an organisation faced with crisis times and are able to use the relationship established within the members of the organisation to their advantage.

2.3.1.3 DEPLOYING THE THEORY

Transformational leaders influence followers' dignity, desire and recognition (Ahmed & Gelaidan, 2013) similarly, according to Northouse (2013) these leaders possess characteristics like charisma and strong values which contribute to their influence on followers. Using this description of transformational leaders, this type of leadership describes perfectly principals able to successfully lead schools during Covid-19. Transformational leaders influence followers through motivating them to reach their full potential (Northouse, 2013) and empower everyone involved in the process (Singh & Lokotsch, 2005). Leaders trying to empower and motivate followers are imperative during a crisis, especially since it was leaders who followers looked to during challenging situations (Bowers et al., 2017). Northouse (2013), Singh and Lokotsch (2005) further agree that leaders are able to harness motivation in both themselves and followers which keeps schools focused during crisis times. These leaders are able to encourage followers to do more than expected and motivate their level of consciousness toward organisational goals in this way ensuring success. As proposed by Harris and Jones (2020) during times of crisis, leadership that is effective in keeping teams connected through collaboration, inspirational and receptive leadership practices will succeed. This type of leadership envisioned by these researchers is the type of leadership Burns (1978) advocated for in his transformational leadership theory so many decades ago. Transformational leaders encourage others to change through effective communication,

strong value systems and motivating others to go further than required (Carlyon & Branson, 2018).

2.3.2 HANDY'S FOUR TYPES OF ORGANISATIONAL CULTURE

In this section I will provide the following for this theory: Justification, unpack the theory and deploying the theory.

2.3.2.1 JUSTIFICATION

School culture determines everything that happens at a school (Taahyadin & Daud, 2018). Therefore, I have chosen Charles Handy's theory to show how the culture prevalent in an organisation can affect how leaders and individuals within the organisation relate during times of crisis. It is culture that determines how things are done in an organisation (Turan & Bektas, 2013) and culture also plays a significant role in maintaining commitment during periods of uncertainty (Ahmad & Gelaidan, 2011).

2.3.2.2 UNPACKING THE THEORY

Charles Handy (1986) defined four different types of culture: power, role, task and person. In power culture, power is held by a few individuals who are able to influence others. These individuals determine how the organisation functions and employees are evaluated by what they achieve. Decisions are quickly and easily made in power culture. In role culture, the organisation is set by roles and there is a detailed organisational structure. Decision making in such cultures can be slow. Power is borrowed from individuals' positions in the organisation. Task culture involves teams working toward solving specific problems. Power is imitative of expertise and skills. In person culture individuals see themselves as different from and more important than the organisation. Power is with each individual.

2.3.2.3 DEPLOYING THE THEORY

Charles Handy's (1993) method of looking at culture links organisational structure to culture. Power culture may be adaptable to crisis situations as leaders take key responsibility and this type of culture deals well with dangers. Role culture is when structure and responsibilities are controlled by assigned leaders. In this type of culture, roles are based on position and proficiency. This type of culture may delay change processes as they are slower at identifying

and implementing changes (Cacciattolo, 2014; Handy, 1993). This may weaken the organisation during crisis times and may not be a suitable culture. Task culture is job orientated and focus is on getting the job done (Cacciattolo, 2014; Handy, 1993). This may be better suited to managing organisations during crisis periods as members come together to focus on the task at hand. Person culture sees the individual as superior to the organisation (Cacciattolo, 2014; Handy, 1993). This type of culture may prove harmful during challenging times as these types of persons are hard to manage (Handy, 1993) which could make the achievement of organisational goals a challenge. Transformational leaders trying to influence and motivate (Burns, 1978) their followers during the pandemic will lean toward a combination of task and role cultures. They would want to encourage staff to work as a team (Handy, 1986) in order to get ‘the job done’ but because this period is a time of uncertainty for everyone, principals will have to draw on their role as leader as is the case in power culture in the organisation. They will have to blend being both motivator and influencer with pulling rank as principal in order to get tasks completed timeously.

2.4 CONCLUSION

In this chapter I reviewed the findings of various researchers with regard to Covid-19 and schooling. I reviewed how researchers found significant opportunities to using Covid-19 as a springboard to evaluating systems in schools with regard to curriculum, assessment and leadership strategies that need reviewing. I also reviewed the two theories: transformational leadership theory and Handy’s four types of organisational culture. The review focused on how both the theories empower principals to use their role as leaders to influence and encourage (Northouse, 2013) team members during a crisis period. The main focus in this chapter was that Covid-19 provided a doorway for principals to review and rethink practices that they have primarily used in the past, given this opportunity they may now relook at how they lead. Drawing on the analogy of this chapter: ‘Seeing the world through nervous eyes’, these leaders are most certainly nervous during this unpredictable period, but transformational leaders will draw on the strength of their influence to steer the job of getting things done. Chapter Three is titled: ‘It starts to get real’ will focus on the research methodology and design used in this study.

CHAPTER THREE

IT STARTS TO GET REAL: DOCUMENTING MY RESEARCH PROCESS

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Chapter Two provided coverage on my literature review and my theoretical framework for the study. The main focus of this chapter will be the research design and methodology. This chapter will further provide justification for my choice of methodology as well as an account of the methods of data collection with an overall reflection of how it worked. This chapter is titled “It starts to get real”. The metaphor I have chosen, as explained in chapter one was the pandemic being compared to a marathon. Chapter Two provided the ‘lens through the eyes of researchers’ as laying the background to competing in the marathon, it is Chapter Three that unpacks the rigorousness, preparation and the emotions experienced by both my participants and me. It is during their presenting of their narratives that this process becomes a reality as they share their lived experiences with me, the dynamic of writing these narrative starts to become a reality. The actual process now of data generation and interpretation becomes real to the participant and researcher.

3.2 RESEARCH PARADIGM

My study takes place within the critical paradigm; based on the belief that this study is intended to help transform how principals manage schools through relationships between school and society (Cohen et al., 2018). Critical paradigm aims to not just record and observe experiences, but to use these experiences to bring about positive changes (Asghar, 2013). The focus of this study is on an emergent phenomenon that is school culture being transformed during the Covid-19 pandemic. This required flexibility from me as the researcher (Asghar, 2013) which this paradigm allowed for. Flexibility in the sense where during a time of uncertainty as a result of the pandemic and changing practices at schools, I had to deviate from normal research practices and switch between online and face to face interactions depending on the preferences of my participants and their busy schedules. In the paragraphs below I deliberate on the ontological and epistemological assumptions of the critical paradigm. Ontology refers to what is there that can be known or what is the essence of reality (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). Ontology concerns itself with the type of world we are probing and the essence of our reality (Cohen et al., 2018; Guba & Lincoln, 1989). Epistemology refers

to the study of how we discover what is real (Cohen et al., 2018). Epistemology is also concerned with establishing a philosophical foundation for determining what types of knowledge are feasible and how we may assure that they are both sufficient and valid (Crotty, 2003). From an ontological perspective critical theory seeks to create a balanced and democratic society by challenging the current quo (Asghar, 2013). It is particularly interested in issues of power relations in society, inequity and oppression. Owing to these ontological assumptions, the critical paradigm becomes appropriate in this study.

From an epistemological perspective, critical theory favours the construction of knowledge that values people as a source of information. Thus, in constructing knowledge the participants are viewed as those with power in terms of having knowledge of the phenomenon under study. Through interactions with my participants and their reflection on their experiences, I endeavoured to guide them into giving their reflections a voice (Creswell & Poth, 2018) and in this way help to show how transformation can be brought about. These voices are made visible through their stories and are depicted in their collages which become a more meaningful part of the research. This “voice” given to my participants through this study, provided the opportunity to identify areas of emancipation from the struggles they experienced (Cohen et al., 2018), as they shared the challenges of this period.

3.3 RESEARCH APPROACH

For someone who preferred words to figures, sitting in my first research master’s lecture, *Discourses and Methodologies in Educational Research*, I knew my choice of research design was always going to be a qualitative study. This I knew would also allow me as researcher, to understand the experiences and actions of my participants (Maxwell, 2008) and develop an understanding of stories of how and why my participants did the things they did. Through this qualitative study I was able to share the lived-experiences of principals through this pandemic which I found to be a developing area of research. As a researcher, I also endeavoured to generate field texts (Clandinin, 2013) in a natural environment bearing in mind sensitivity to the participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The restrictions of Covid-19 did however limit data generation in a completely natural environment as I was restricted to some interviews being conducted online. Interviews that were conducted in person were also restricted as my interactions were limited to experiences shared behind shields and masks so facial expressions were veiled. Facial expressions indicate a speaker's attitude, emotions, or

intentions, and are thus second only to words in determining an individual speaker's internal feelings transmitted in face-to-face communication (Ismail, 2017) and the Covid-19 protocols limited my view of this important aspect.

3.4 METHODOLOGY

Growing up I loved listening to stories that my gran and mum often shared with us. I loved listening to the intimate details of their childhoods and drawing parallels to each other as well as to some degree my own. Becoming a foundation phase teacher and later a teacher of English, my favourite lessons were always the story telling. I loved bringing in the drama through actions and voice projections then drawing on parallels to life experiences in the story or current events. So, choosing to use narrative inquiry as my methodology, became an obvious choice. As a design kind, narrative inquiry is both a means of comprehending experience and a research process (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Individual experiences may be studied in depth across time and in context using this technique, as it pays significant attention to the importance of relationship experience as a narrative phenomenon engagement (Clandinin, 2013). As researchers, we wish to comprehend human lives, and narratives hold traces of those lives (Andrews et al., 2013) especially since as humans we enjoy talking about ourselves and our lives through story lines. As a methodology it also allows the researcher to work between the spaces as one produces data, analyses it and then represents it (Byrne, 2017). The storytellers create their stories to express a certain view on an event. The goal of narrative inquiry is to uncover the meanings of people's experiences rather than objective, decontextualised facts (Clandinin, 2013; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

As I conducted my research, I found that narrative inquiry allowed me to give structure (Polkinghorne, 1988), gain access and space for productive discussion (Byrne, 2017) when researching the challenges as well as the successes my participants experienced. I was curious to hear their experiences, and how they gave meaning to the challenges as well as their many successes through their narratives (Byrne, 2017; Caine et al., 2013) as I felt like that little girl again listening to my mum's life unfold. I also learned that narrative inquiry allowed me not to set rigid rules, so I would be able to see varying layers that they gave meaning to and communicated their experiences (Andrews et al., 2013). The main themes outlined in chapter two that I chose, enhanced the "plot" as they gave significance to their individual roles in the narrative (Polkinghorne, 1988). These themes enabled the plot to blend (Polkinghorne, 1988)

together the difficulties as they narrated their story and gave form to the events they experienced.

3.5 SELECTION OF PARTICIPANTS

My study was conducted in two primary schools in the township of Phoenix, in KwaZulu-Natal. Phoenix is a township that is home to middle-income and a greater majority of low-income households. I selected Phoenix as the township to conduct my research through convenience sampling. Convenience or opportunity sampling allows the researcher to choose location, sites and participants from those that the researcher has easy access (Cohen et al., 2018) and in my case Phoenix is the township that I live in so my participants would be easily accessible to me. Two primary school principals were then purposively selected for this study. Purposive sampling is a selection process used in qualitative research, where the researcher handpicks the participants, based on certain characteristics (Cohen et al., 2018) and are relatively small in number to allow thorough study (Bernard, 2000). I selected participants in the community to study their real-life experiences with Covid-19 and ask how they transformed school culture during the pandemic. I sought out knowledgeable principals who have had varying experiences with transforming their school culture during this challenging time, by virtue of their expertise and experience (Cohen et al., 2018). My choice of participants became easier after my ward co-ordinator (who interacted with principals in the township as he supervised their school activities) guided my choices through his interactions with various principals in the Phoenix township. One of my participants had agreed to participate in the study, but during the actual data generation stage I was unable to receive a response from him to set up the narrative interview sessions with this participant. Due to a lengthy period of silence from this participant (no responses to emails or text messages), I had to go back to my list of potential participants identified during my interaction with the ward co-ordinator. I thanked the participant via an email (see Figure 3.1 below). I then proceeded to contact the next principal on my list of potential participants. Thankfully he agreed to be a part of this study and I could then proceed with the data generation.

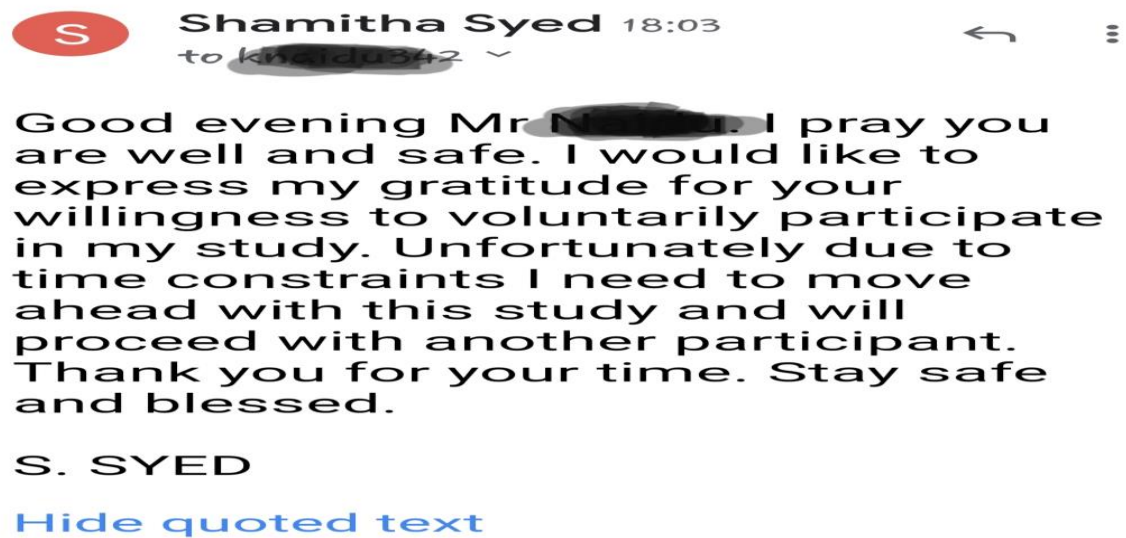


Figure 3.1 Screenshot of email to participant no longer in the study

The schools selected are referred to by pseudonyms. The schools will be referred to as Rainbow Primary and Freedom Primary. Rainbow Primary and Freedom Primary are public co-education schools catering for Grades R to 7. They are situated within the heart of the Phoenix township. Rainbow Primary is approximately 10 minutes' drive away from Freedom Primary. Rainbow Primary caters for learners living within the township of Phoenix as well as learners from outlying areas including Inanda, Mount Moriah and Mount Royal. Freedom Primary's learner population includes learners from within the Phoenix township, Inanda and Mawoti.

The principals in the study were selected based on their extensive knowledge and practice of leadership as both participants have served as principals for 18 years each. One male and one female principal was selected. This ensured that issues of gender equity would be addressed in this study which is significant within the critical theory. For the sake of anonymity, they will be referred to as Mr Govind and Mrs Adam. Both principals are South African of Indian descent.

Mrs Adam has been a principal at Rainbow Primary since 2003. She has worked as head of department and deputy principal at two high schools within the Phoenix township. I selected Mrs Adam because she is one of the few female long-serving principals still heading a school. In my interactions with Mrs Adam prior to this study, she always presented herself as a calm, approachable and knowledgeable leader. During the pandemic, Rainbow Primary was one of the schools in the township that was able to offer guidance and support to both parents

and neighbouring schools to ride the initial storm of the pandemic. I chose Mr Govind because not only had I worked under his leadership many years ago but also because he was one of the principals in the township driving change on many levels prior to Covid-19 and during the pandemic. He was always thrust into difficult situations over the years and has always found his way on the other side of a challenge much stronger. He has always been a leader willing to support and grow his school community and neighbouring schools. The principals of such schools were a natural choice for this study.

3.6 DATA GENERATION

My main method of data generation was through narrative interviews. Narrative interviewing is a form of qualitative data generation in which the interviewee is asked to tell a story. The aim of narrative interviews, in contrast to other forms of qualitative interviewing, is to allow the subject to narrate his or her experience for the interviewer (Allan, 2017). The researcher uses a narrative approach to tell the stories of the people in order to get a better understanding of their experiences; narrative inquiry often enables the story to offer insight about the participants to the readers (Adams & Rodriguez, 2020). I have also selected collage inquiry as a second data generation method. This method is becoming more prominent in narrative inquiry as it allows for participants to provide visual texts (Butler-Kisber, 2008) which serve as prompts to give voice to their stories (see Appendix A, p. 131).

3.6.1 NARRATIVE INTERVIEWS

I chose interviews as a method of data generation because it allowed me to gather information that brings out explanations of specific experiences (Cohen et al., 2011) in order to understand the phenomenon of transforming school culture during Covid-19. This method of data generation allowed for me to work within the critical paradigm as narrative interviews allow the researcher to walk alongside the participants as they tell their stories (Caine et al., 2013). We were able to downplay our power relations (as researcher and principal) and come together to generate data. This reduction of power roles allowed for an equalisation of the researcher and participant to develop a trust relationship as participants shared intricate details during the data generation (Cohen et al., 2018). Interviews also enabled me to interpret the experiences of my participants through their stories as they voluntarily shared

details barring out the asymmetrical relationship, I share with my participants outside of this study (Asghar, 2013) as I have worked under one participant while the second participant has served as a mentor figure during my years as an educator. When conducting these interviews, I had to constantly remind myself to use language that is used by my participants (Moen, 2006). Narrative interviews also provide greater pliability and offer the opportunity for in-depth details (Cohen et al., 2018; Jaison, 2018; Low, 2007; Miller, 2008; Punch, 2005) to generate information, as I'm eliciting data on the experiences of principals in transforming culture (Jaison, 2018; Punch, 2005; Wildemuth, 2017). Wildemuth (2017) advises when conducting narrative interviews, not to impose too much structure or I would have had little control over (Punch, 2005) my participants. This I found quite necessary during my interviews as my participants were free to share their experiences without hinderance. Had I imposed rigid structure it would have resulted in my directing their responses, and I could get an incomplete understanding of their lived-experiences. Narrative interviews are also a versatile (Punch, 2005) and cost-effective method of generating data over a limited period. The area of Covid-19 experiences by principals is an emerging area of study, so as proposed by Low (2007) - narrative interviews are advantageous to the researcher, when looking at this new phenomenon. I also felt during the course of the interviews that my participants wanted their stories to be heard.

During the days prior to generating field texts, I immersed myself in reading articles on narrative interviews. The more I read, the more I felt comforted that my choice of data generation would allow me to present the clearest picture for my study. Later as I began generating the field texts, I realised what Caine et al's., (2013) were referring to when they spoke of a research relationship with participants as I stepped into their lives in the midst of searching and researching for my own story. The one day while waiting outside to be screened at Rainbow Primary, I pondered over how true Caine's et al., (2013) words were, when they said we begin to ask who we are as researchers in the study. I most certainly can say I did not walk away unchanged from my experiences as I engaged with my participants. I began to see the mammoth task they had before them prior to Covid-19, the task of transforming organisational culture. This was then exacerbated later by the pandemic. I saw the impact this experience had on my participants' relationships and self-esteem which helped me learn about the extremely difficult role these leaders play at school.

Narrative inquiry does allow the researcher to 'live-alongside' participants (Caine et al., 2013) however, I felt robbed of this experience due to the constraints of Covid-19. This was

especially true during my very first interview which was conducted online with the participant's camera turned off due to her having technical difficulties. Covid-19 restrictions placed on individuals, limited my ability to walk alongside them as well as we had to take heed of social distancing and maintaining limited contact for long periods of time (Department of Basic Education, 2020). The use of masks and shields in front of tables also restricted us from having lengthy dialogue and reading facial expressions fully.

My readings of narrative interviews drew my attention to the different phases of interviews. While conducting my interview I saw the phases unfold more clearly. The initial phase included outlining the processes of the interview which was done prior to the actual interview. I assured my participants that they will be free to share their experiences in their own words. To set the process we engaged in what Jovchelovitch and Bauer (2000) refer to as exmanent questions. Here I asked them to speak about their personal and professional life. I asked them about their early leadership roles and their experiences with mentor leaders. In the next phase which was the crux of the interview, I delved into their experiences during the period of the pandemic. I limited my voice and allowed them to share their story at their own pace. In the third phase of the interviews, I changed the exmanent questions to immanent questions as a way of clarifying concepts discussed and requested them to reflect on their overall experiences during this period. I maintained the language of my participants and elicited information about their reflections on their experiences and the type of advice they will provide to principals in the future. In the final stage once the recordings were stopped and we were able to share personal experiences in order to tie up our experience.

3.6.2 COLLAGE INQUIRY

As my second method, I chose the collage inquiry. Using visual methods, like collages as data generation allowed for the generation of information, based on multiple realities (Butler-Kisber & Poldma, 2010). It is used to understand the phenomena more clearly. The word 'collage' as cited by Butler-Kisber and Poldma (2010) and Gerstenblatt (2013) is derived from the French word "*colle*" meaning to stick pieces together to show or relate an understanding of a phenomenon. As collages are used for reflecting, obtaining and as a strategy to conceptualise ideas (Butler-Kisber & Poldma, 2010; Gerstenblatt, 2013), it assisted my participants in reflecting on their experiences, while trying to conceptualise it by using pictorial representation in drawing up their collages. This method of data generation

also aligned with the critical paradigm as it is a participatory methodology allowing the participant to tap into their creative side (Gerstenblatt, 2013) which they did without focusing on any power relations that may exist between researcher and the researched. This was clearly visible through their reactions when they selected images. I felt that the collage allowed my participants to give a visual picture to the challenges they experienced; thoughts and ideas that they could not put in words could be pictorially represented.

In our sessions allocated to the compilation of the collage, participants were provided with the following guidance:

- Set aside approximately two hours for this activity
- You will be provided with newspaper articles (local, international and online) together with other materials (scissor, glue, paper and pens)
- You are at liberty to include your own articles and pictures from preferred sources
- Seek out pictures or words that resonate with you about your experience
- Create a theme to guide your collage representation. Be as creative as you like.
- Use the pictures, phrases, letters or words to compile your collage
- This part of the session will not be recorded. You will have 90 minutes for this part.
- My role at this stage will be as observer. Once the collage is complete you will be given approximately 30 minutes to discuss your compilation of your collage. This segment will be recorded.

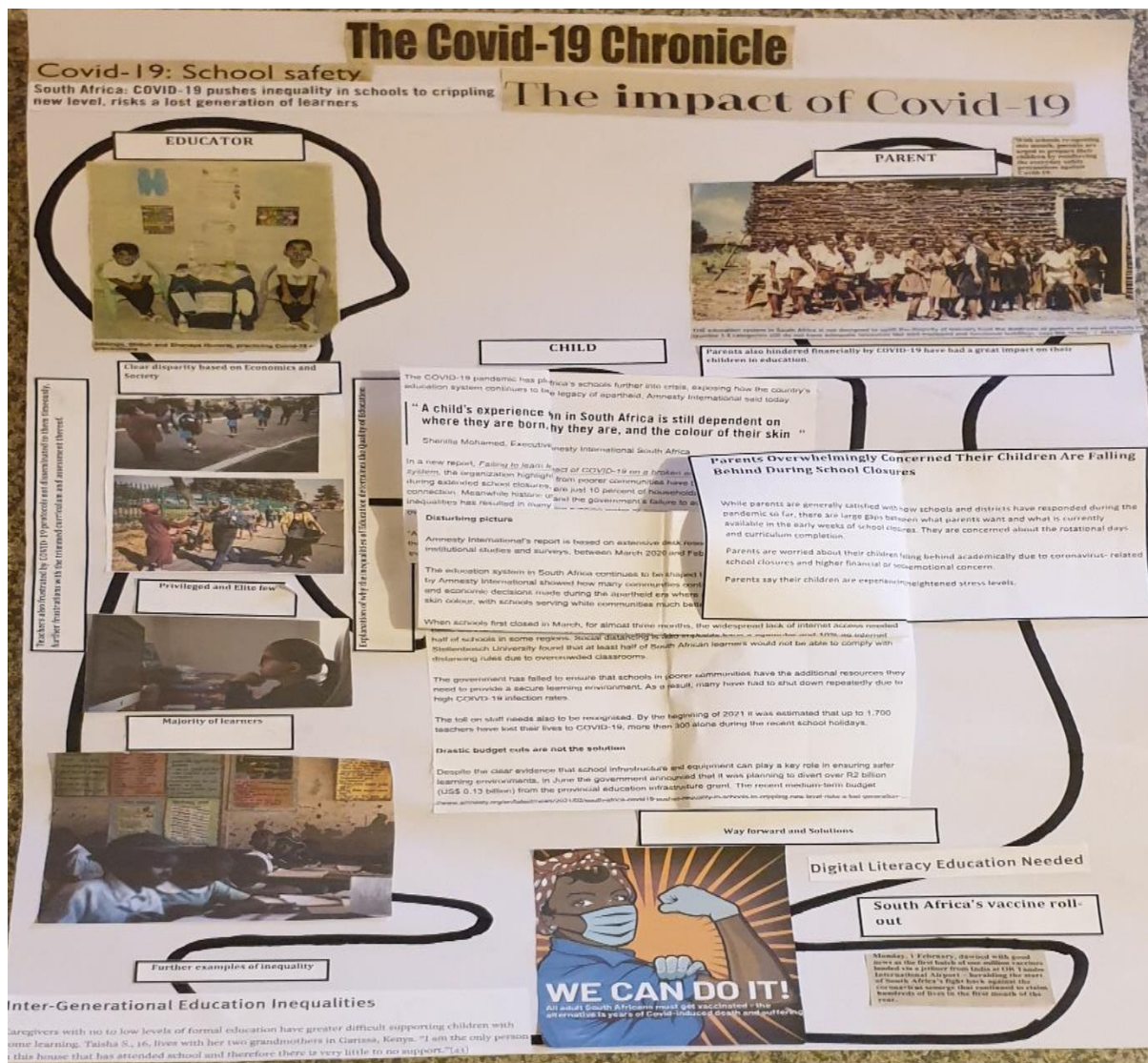


Figure 3.2 Collage by Mrs Adam

My first participant Mrs Adam was very excited during this session as it allowed her to express herself using her creativity. She had selected a figurine from her office representing a mother and child as a basis for her theme for the collage. The role of family in her life clearly came through her work as she chose her theme. She added the other significant role player – the educator as the third element to her theme. I remember during one of our sessions when the recorder was off, she spoke with conviction around the role of education in shaping society and her own life. She brought together two elements that shaped her leadership: family and the importance of education in her collage. I was able to see visually what Butler-Kisber and Poldma (2010) spoke of when they referred to the coming together of information from multiple realities.



Figure 3.3: *Mr Govind's collage*

During the final sessions when I went to meet Mr Govind, I could tell he was very excited about the upcoming task. During the session he was beaming with pride as he selected pictures and information clips to compile his collage. Even though the mask and shield obscured my view, I could tell that Butler-Kisber and Poldma (2010) as well as Gerstenblatt's (2013) view on collage compilation giving the participant the opportunity to visualise their lived-experience was coming alive in front of me. The use of the world being overcome by the virus as the main theme but the power to remain positive through strong leadership came through clearly in Mr Govind's collage.

3.7 DATA ANALYSIS

In order to analyse data generated, I conducted a narrative analysis and later an analysis of narratives. There are two ways to analyse a narrative whereby the narrative analysis tries to analyse the narrative on its own while analysis of narrative is a scientific method that attempts to single out common themes across a series of narratives (Caine et al., 2013).

3.7.1 NARRATIVE ANALYSIS

Narrative analysis provides a powerful procedure to analyse and present qualitative data. There may be critical moments or important events selected to present outcomes experienced by the narrator, (Cohen et al., 2018), in this case the principals in the study. The data generated from the study is developed into a thematic plot (Polkinghorne, 1995) to answer the research puzzle. Polkinghorne (1995) proposes that a narrative analysis results in an outcome of the episodes of the participant’s life. My responsibility was to combine the varied experiences or episodes of the participants into a well-composed story synthesising the data generated. I used the storyboarding approach to blend field texts into logical stories (Naicker et al., 2020) in order to bring visual learning to life when re-storying data from my participants. Storyboarding helped me represent the data generated in a tasteful manner (Naicker et al., 2020). During the compilation of my storyboards, I was able to visualise the varying realities of my participants and develop my emplotments. I remembered while identifying these links what Loh (2013) referred to when he said the story must ‘ring true’ and as I began to reconstruct the narratives at this stage, I hoped to see this in my study as well.

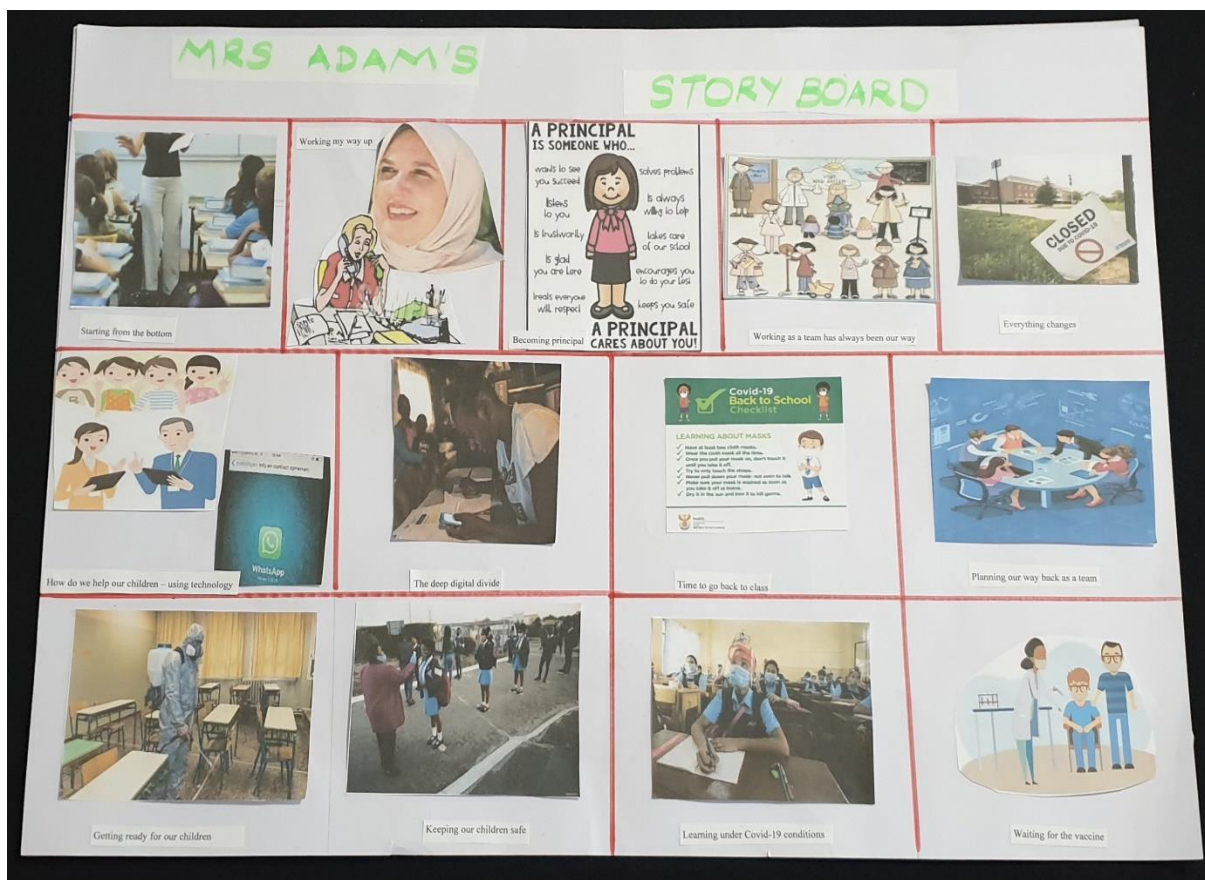


Figure 3.4: Mrs Adam’s storyboard

Storyboarding is a visual portrayal of significant experiences chosen at random. It makes us to negotiate the insider/outsider dynamic with less closure and more possible readings of situational meaning (Naicker et al., 2020). Storyboarding has been a method used in filmmaking for many years (Greenberg et al., 2012). It has been part of the planning process whereby shot by shot is laid out in order to develop the story. Through the use of this narrative analysis process, I was able to live out a childhood fantasy of being involved in filmmaking albeit a sort of documentary sharing the lived experiences of my participants. During the compilation of my first storyboard: Mrs Adam’s storyboard, I had to deconstruct the typical sequential and constrained re-storying technique of revealing the lived educational environment I wanted to understand (Naicker et al., 2020). It allowed me to delve into my creative side when I selected the random experiences my participants spoke about as I began to develop my emplotments.

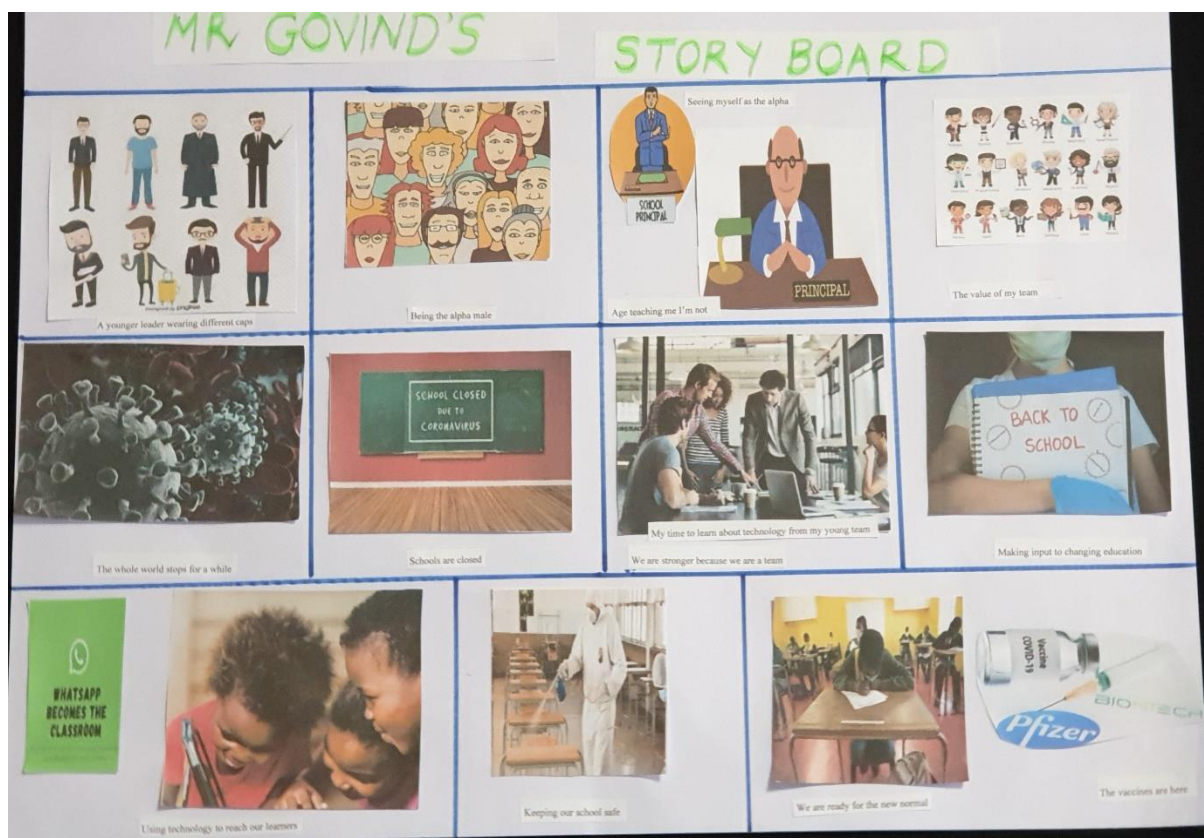


Figure 3.5: *Mr Govind’s storyboard*

When building the storyboard for Mr Govind’s narrative, it became potent and emancipatory area for me as researcher learning and developing my creative knowledge of lived lives by redirecting and tapping into creative thinking (Naicker, et al., 2020). I got to ‘direct’ someone who portrayed himself as the alpha male at the start of the plot. Later in my analysis I had to

creatively show how he grew into a team player himself. This was a very exciting research experience for a novice researcher like myself. Storyboarding gave me an opportunity to visualise the development of my emplotments which were necessary to rebuild the stories of my participants.

3.7.2 ANALYSIS OF NARRATIVES

During the analysis of narratives, the researcher examines the narratives constructed by participants (Cohen et al., 2018). This becomes the consequence of the research conducted. A thematic analysis is a technique for finding, analysing, organising, summarising and reporting themes in a set of data (Nowell et al., 2017). The analysis of narratives was put together bearing in mind each participants individuality and the reasons for acting the way they did within their particular social contexts while developing the themes. In order to analyse the narratives, I sought out common themes and particularities of experience (Polkinghorne, 1995) that can be found across both narratives from my participants. During this process I identified themes that link both participants even though they both were very different people.

3.7.2.1 ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

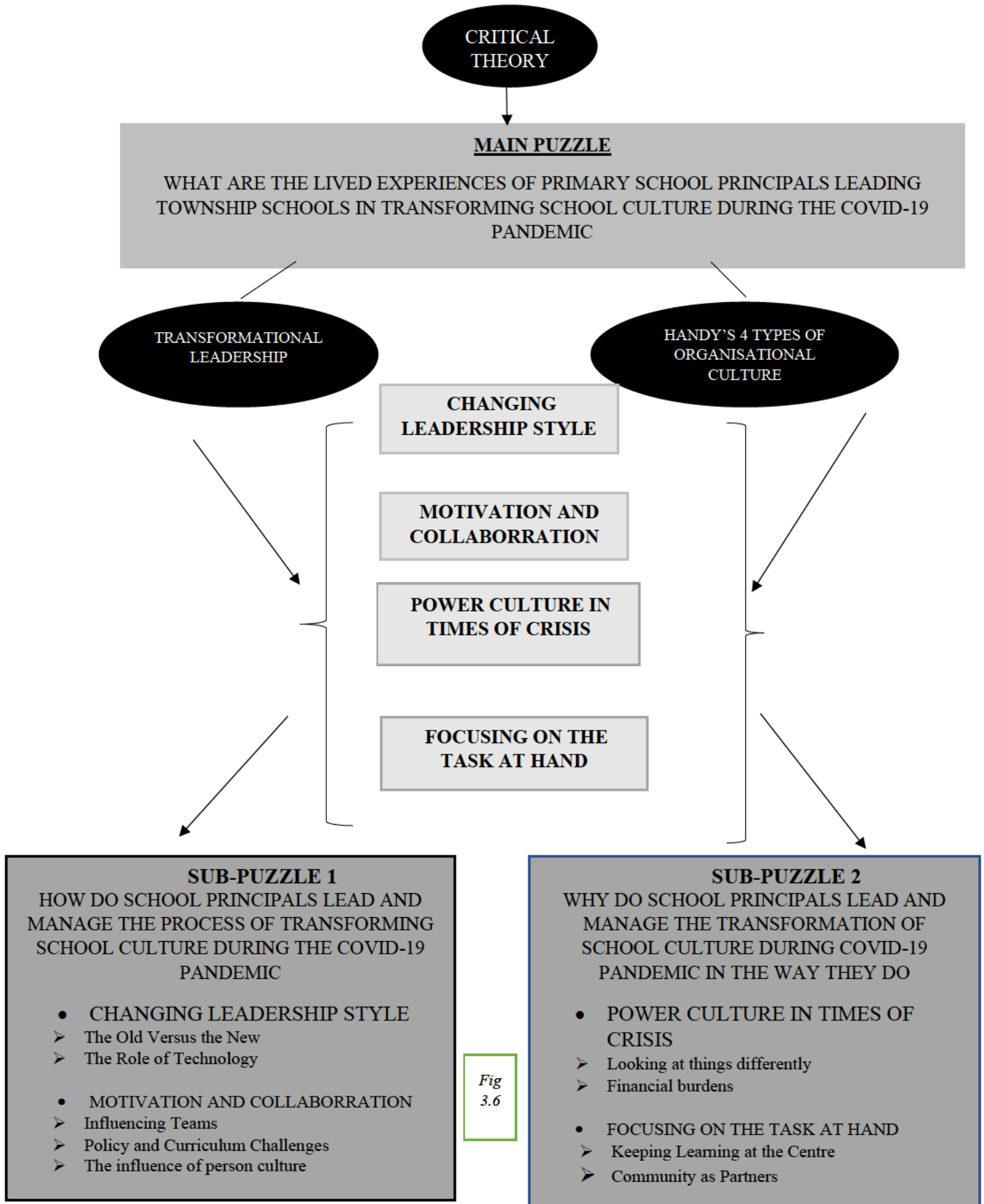


Fig 3.6

In order to analyse the narratives, I referred to the main puzzle and the two sub-puzzles (unpacked in Chapter One) and at the same time keeping the critical theory as the paradigm through which the study is conducted. I evaluated issues of power, inequity, and oppression; unpacking how this influenced the actions of principals during this period. I analysed whether education through educational leaders (principals), during this period succeeded in removing issues of inequality and injustices (Gibson, 1986). I analysed issues of economic and state power as well as cultural influences during this period (Gibson, 1986). In order to answer the puzzles, I have used Burns' (1978) transformational leadership theory and Handy's (1986) four types of organisational culture theory in order to guide my analysis. During the study of Burns' theory, I found him drawing on empowering followers, encouraging, and developing members to change their capabilities and in this way testing the existing culture (Burns, 1978). This drove me to select two of my main themes: changing leadership style and motivation and collaboration. During the study of Handy's theory, I saw the importance of power culture when trying to influence changing leadership as well as the importance of role culture while ensuring motivation and collaboration driving effective teams (Handy, 1986). This quantified the analysis process for sub-puzzle one in the study. When working through sub-puzzle two, the importance of task and power culture from Handy's (1986) theory combined with Burns' (1978) input on leaders encouraging participative decision-makers became the background to selecting the themes of power culture in times of crisis and focusing on the task at hand.

The sub-themes selected in each sub-puzzle were developed through inductive-deductive analysis were as researcher I moved between a back-and-forth process that allowed me to observe and develop inferences (induction) and also refer to theory leading to implications (deduction) (Cohen et al., 2018). Induction allowed me as researcher to conduct my analysis with an open-mind disregarding preconceived ideas as I read through the transcripts (Gabriel, 2013) on the other hand deduction facilitated the use of predetermined concepts (Gabriel, 2013) I had referred to during the themes I used to review literature in Chapter Two. This combination of inductive-deductive process led me to developing groups of sub-themes which also enabled me to see links between certain sub-themes. As an example, with sub-puzzle one I was able to draw on the power culture from Handy's (1986) theory, using the deductive process and analyse how collaborative leaders were able to use power to influence teams. While in sub-puzzle two one sees through the inductive process how the influence of

focusing on the task during crisis times allowed for keeping learning as a central goal as well as acknowledging that community partnerships were essential to ensuring success.

3.8 TRUSTWORTHINESS

In order for a narrative study to be accepted and used, criteria or guidelines need to be set (Loh, 2013). It was important to note that although criteria or guidelines are set, as a study based in the critical paradigm within a qualitative study, truth is informed by the human experiences as lived and informed by the participants (Krefting, 1991). The focus was on verisimilitude and utility in determining validity and reliability from my participants. The use of a journal to reflect on my research also helped me express my thoughts, keep track of events and it provided a platform to vent my challenges (see Figure 3.7).

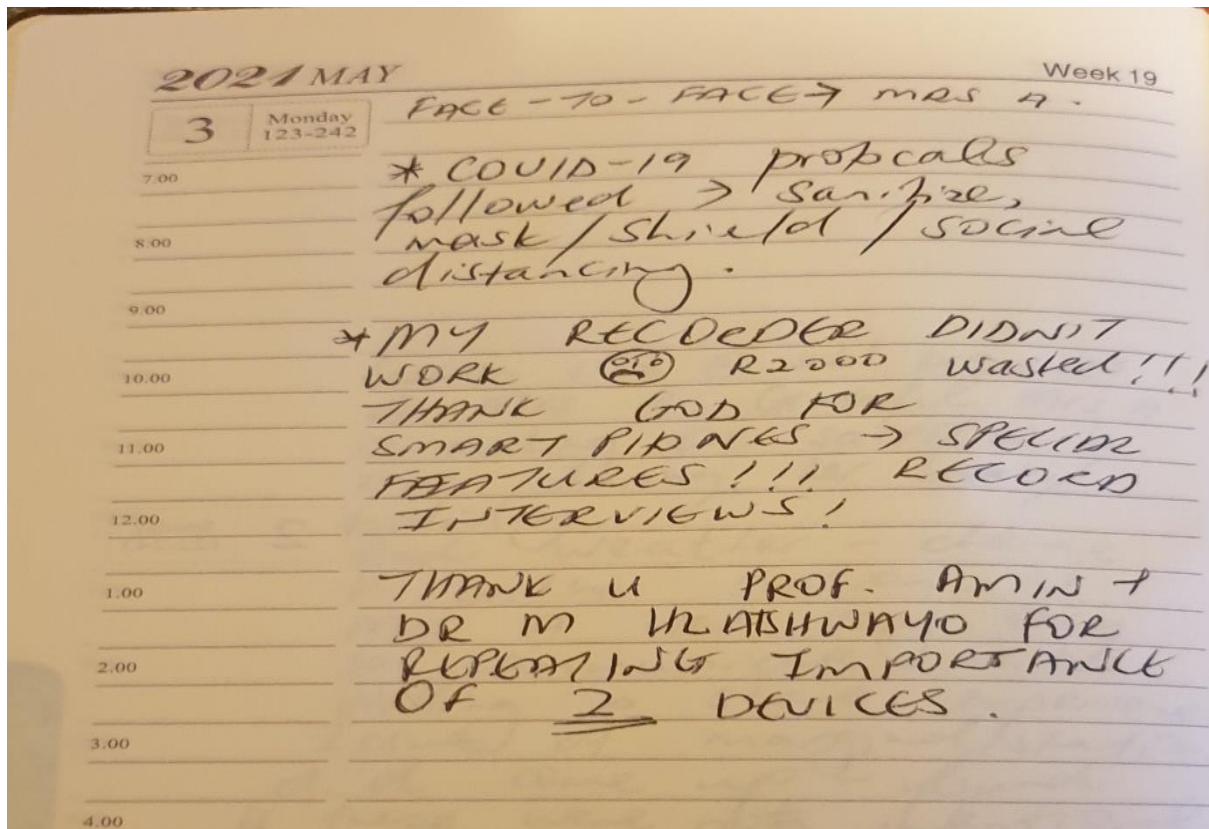


Figure 3.7 Journal entry during my data generation

3.9 VERISIMILITUDE

It is important for readers of my study to understand why the participants made the decisions and took the actions that they did. For me as researcher to attain verisimilitude or accuracy, the study must “ring true” (Loh, 2013) and be believable. Verisimilitude was achieved

through getting rich descriptions from my participants, so that readers can experience the events being described (Creswell & Miller, 2010). Further credibility was achieved through member checking - as the participants were given the opportunity to check the interpretations of their narratives (Carlson, 2010). Data collected was scrutinised for accuracy and changes made to ensure trustworthiness. Other techniques included a peer review, whereby a peer involved with narrative research was given the opportunity to review the study as the reviewer is familiar with this type of research (Creswell & Miller, 2010) and so added to its credibility. Audience validation after the study is presented will further solidify the trustworthiness of my study. These will be the actual people who would have had the necessary experience to determine whether the interpretation makes sense, is logical, and is connected to how other principals perceive the reality within the school (Loh, 2013).

3.10 UTILITY

This research study will add to the knowledge base on dealing with the challenge of transforming school culture during a time of crisis, as it will offer problem-solving measures (Loh, 2013). It will provide an understanding of how principals led and managed schools in the way that they did. This may enhance the research base for information available on transforming school culture even in difficult times, as most studies focus on achieving this during stable periods in education. It may provide direction for the reader about the paths to be taken to achieve success (Loh, 2013). Through keeping an audit trail containing logs of the various activities (Creswell & Miller, 2010), readers may be able to use the information to see its credibility and refer to it for future use. The reader may be able to see how power roles can be downplayed when leading teams during a crisis and the importance of equality when trying to transform school culture during a pandemic.

3.11 ETHICS

Since this study is based on narrative research and participants shared personal experiences, their identities remain anonymous in this way absolute confidentiality was maintained bearing in mind they are also people in power and their anonymity be respected (Cohen et al., 2018; Mack et al., 2005). Pseudonyms were used for both the schools and participants. When my participants told their story, others involved may have been implicated. To ensure I treated them with the ethics they deserved, I used pseudonyms to protect their identity (Cohen et al., 2018). People and institutions who were implicated in the narratives were

referred to anonymously. Participants participated in the study of their own volition and were free to exit the process at any time without any details shared (Cohen et al., 2018). This was the case with the first participant who did not participate in this study. To ensure the study was ethically accepted, I firstly applied to the University of KwaZulu-Natal for ethical clearance which was granted (see Ethical Clearance Certificate, p. iii). I also applied to the two gatekeepers (Cohen et al., 2018; Mack et al., 2005); the Department Basic of Education and the school principals for permission to conduct the study (see Appendix B, p. 133 and Appendix C, p. 134). Prior to the commencement of the interviews, informed consent (Cohen et al., 2018) was requested and signed by the two participants (see Appendix D, p.136). Informed consent was an important aspect of participating in a study since it provided all of the information a potential participant needed to comprehend what they were volunteering for. Subjects may not completely comprehend what they are doing if informed consent was not given (Cohen et al., 2018; Mack et al., 2005).

3.12 CONCLUSION

In this chapter I focused on the research design and methodology. This study is based in the critical paradigm with the narrative inquiry being the methodology I used. Through this study I have realised the importance of narrative research as a way of eliciting information from subjects to gain access into people's lived experiences. I have also noted the exciting concept of storyboarding in analysing my participants' stories, I felt like a film director. Through this chapter I also explained the process of data collection and selection of participants. Lastly, I provided details on ethical issues, trustworthiness, verisimilitude and utility. Chapter Four unpacks the narratives of my two participants.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE MIDDLE MILES: NARRATIVES OF PRINCIPALS

4.1 INTRODUCTION

In Chapter Three I unpacked the research design and methodology of my study. I chose narrative inquiry and used narrative interviews as well as collage inquiry to generate data. In this chapter I will share my first segment of analysis of the data generated which is the narrative analysis (Polkinghorne, 1995). I have chosen to title this chapter “The Middle Miles” as part of my metaphor of comparing the study to running a marathon. It is in the ‘middle miles’ of a marathon that the runner is made or broken, so it is in the narratives that the reader will have a clearer picture of the actual experiences of my participants. The reader will be able to read about the untold experiences of leading schools during Covid-19 by these principals and read about how they survived the struggle of leading and managing schools during this pandemic. I have used pseudonyms for both the schools and the participants. I begin with the story of Mrs Adam and share her experiences; I then move onto Mr Govind and uncover his narrative. During the sampling stage of my study as outlined in Chapter Three, I purposively selected Mrs Adam as my first participant therefore I found it appropriate to tell her story first.

4.2 MRS ADAM’S STORY: FAMILY IN EVERYTHING

Mrs Adam’s central focus as a leader has always been family closely linked to her faith which will become evidently clear during her narrative.

EDUCATION FIRST

I grew up in a relatively conservative community in northern KwaZulu-Natal where I lived with my parents and siblings. My father passed on early in my life leaving my mum as a central figure. After completing high school, I set off to one of the only education training colleges at that time to study teaching. I then went on to complete my Honours degree and later my Master’s degree. Growing up in a time when you were part of the oppressed both as a result of race and gender, I focused on ensuring I could become someone who would make a difference. I always knew I wanted to be a leader hence my specialisation always lingered

around education leadership. Education has always been a very important part of my life because I believe with an education one can achieve their dreams and break the cycle of oppression we were experiencing especially with the limitations we as women often experience. I therefore firmly believe in what former president Nelson Mandela said about education being our most powerful weapon we can use to change the world.

My first appointment as an educator was in a high school in the Phoenix Township. I later moved to a high school out of Phoenix. After a short tenure away from Phoenix, it was time to come back when I was appointed as head of department. I served in this position for two years and it was during this time I also had the opportunity to act as deputy principal. This helped me ease into the transition of being a leader when I had to become deputy principal within a short period of time.

LEADERSHIP IN MY EARLY YEARS

I think as teachers we are all leaders. I started as a leader first in my classroom where I was responsible for setting the tone of my class and my first responsibility was to lead the young minds in my care. For nineteen years I saw myself as a leader within the confines of the class. At this stage my leadership intermingled with learners and their parents. As the figure of authority within the class, I would lead learners through activities of teaching and learning in the classroom while I would motivate, guide, and support their parents to reinforce in their children the goal of using education as a way of liberation from their living conditions. As I lead my class, I was seeing leadership through a different lens as I now wielded power over the young minds I had in my care and I tried to instil values in their young minds that I hoped would one day enable them to be liberated from conditions of oppression they may experience. As a teacher I was the competent authority in the class to influence and control ideas away from oppressive tendencies I encountered in my youth growing up in South Africa. Later as I became a head of department, I had to lead teachers as well as oversee curriculum. For two years as I performed my duties as head of department, I became a figure of authority to mentor guide and support staff members I had under my supervision. My role as leader began to get broader as I was now involved in decisions at a school level and not just the confines of my classroom. Here the power dynamic began to grow as I now was able to lead classroom leaders and I aimed to help those under my leadership to not see me as someone who wielded power over them but rather someone they could learn from. Then as

deputy principal my responsibilities grew as I was now second-in-charge at school and I had to lead learners, educators, managers as well as oversee curriculum, finance and various other areas that fell under my ambit. With this position I saw the role power can yield so I endeavoured to not use this power to create any division but rather as a learning experience for the important leadership role I would soon take on.

When I think back to one of the early challenges that schools experienced during the late 1980s early 1990s when students began to make their voices heard during the significant stage of South Africa's fight for democracy. School protests were becoming the order of the day. In an age when the oppressor being the apartheid government of the time used their power to oppress the majority of people, a young teacher like myself, watched with some degree of amusement as management of the school had little control over the activities of students during this period. As a teacher I was amused because we saw members of management struggle to enforce basic school rules. I later remember reflecting on the difficult task that leaders at school were faced with as they had to maintain order at school while not violating the rights of students or teachers who had now become more politically aware of their environment.

TAKING ON MY NEW ROLE

In 2003 when I walked into Rainbow Primary to take over the helm of principalship I felt a great sense of responsibility being placed on me as I had to now become the liaison between the then Department of Education and Rainbow Primary. The school needed to establish a vision and a mission that would help to direct the culture of a school willing to transform learning and teaching and this was now my responsibility as the figure of authority now leading the school. All of this had to be done within certain policies and procedures outlined by the Department of Basic Education. It was a time that as a young leader heading a school that I experienced my new role as someone who could use the power given to me to suppress or emancipate those in my team. It was here that I chose to draw on my ingrained value of the importance of family and my faith in order to show those under my leadership that someone in power does not necessarily oppress those they lead. While I was a young mother managing a household, I now had to balance this with my new family at Rainbow Primary. I began to knit together this new family layer by layer based on a relationship of trust and collaboration.

I believe as a leader we enjoy much success at Rainbow Primary because of the culture of trust and the culture of collaboration that has become the essence of us at Rainbow Primary. My teachers, I can honestly say love school because we have a very low absentee rate at my school. I share a close relationship with my team by constantly talking to them about issues they are dealing with. Even though I represent a figure of authority over them we have established a relationship where they understand that as head of the school I am a leader they may also look to for support.

MY TEAM AS MY FAMILY

Without sounding pompous I believe that my leadership style of treating my team as a family helped me gain many of my successes. Just like in a home the decisions are taken by the parents as they have the power to, but collaborate with other members in the household, as Principal I drew on this power dynamic as head of the school but ensured ongoing collaboration with staff. Besides my role as a leader is very closely directed by my faith which has become very important to me over the years. My faith has helped me understand that we can use power to build people and not tear them down. As a leader I was able to encourage my team to focus on the tasks at hand and through collaborative work achieve our goals set. Since I saw my team as a family, I knew their strengths and weaknesses, and in this way I was able to guide them through their roles. During my early experiences as a leader, I had interacted with a manager who was very controlling and wanted all information to be passed via her. This interaction showed me that power can be used to oppress and frustrate others, so I preferred to be a leader who believed in trusting the skills of my team. I believe that as leader I have to empower my team by allowing them to take responsibility for tasks they have been assigned. I choose to use this influence that I have as my responsibility to mentor to guide, help and support them complete their tasks but not take control. I then allow them to bask in the success once they achieve it. But like any family it is not that we did not have our issues. I remember this one head of department who headed the one phase, and she was trying to run her own school within the school. She used the influence she was charged with to separate her team from the rest of our school. But because I could see she was achieving success through the goals she set for her team, I allowed her the freedom. I believe sometimes it is important to let people just be.

Looking further than my team the central focus at Rainbow Primary is our children. Since we serve a community that is within a township like Phoenix the way we lead is very important. Some of our children come from very impoverished homes where they are taken care of by their ‘gogos’ (grandmothers) so we try and connect with them. I remember when we had to assist such families with school fee exemption. We used this power that we had as a draw card to have families from such homes apply. We made the effort to travel into their communities and meet with members from these households on the outskirts of the township of Phoenix to see how we could assist them but at the same time use the influence we had to remind them of their role in supporting their children with their school activities. This has helped us ensure that these guardians and parents become much more supportive of our goal of offering their children quality education. It also helped to ensure our school community understood the pivotal role school fees played in our goal of offering quality teaching and learning. The effort of building this relationship with our school community is cemented by a supportive staff who make the effort of supporting our children not just in the classroom. I can say unequivocally that there are no issues of inequity where children feel left out because of their socio-economic status for example. This I’ve seen them do by ensuring learners who cannot afford kits for sporting activities or entry fees for external competitions are catered for.

THEN ONE DAY IT ALL CHANGED

Pre-Covid-19 Rainbow Primary had established a set culture of doing things; our key focus being quality teaching and learning. We established certain ways of achieving this by ensuring preparation of all activities be it curriculum implementation, co-curricular or extra-curricular programmes planning was done well in advance. Everyone on my team knew exactly what their role was and what was expected of them. Management members used their influence to consult but ensure policies were adhered to. Curriculum policies changed over the years, but we were able to adapt to the changes because everyone knew they had to be adaptable to change. Then entered Covid-19 and we were thrown one of our biggest curveballs ever. We were at a loss initially because there was no guidance from the Department of Basic Education especially since Rainbow Primary prides itself on working within policy and procedural guidelines. We consistently prescribe to the authority the Department of Basic Education yields over us as a school. But now information was coming

through the media outlets without clear direction or training from the Department of Basic Education. This resulted in each school (even within the same area) doing different things. Although the element of fear began to increase, as principal I was not willing to allow that to cloud my thinking. I had to put on a strong front so that the rest of my team felt safer.

The Department of Basic Education who wielded power over curriculum over the years, made amendments to the curriculum and as has been the practice at Rainbow Primary we implemented these changes as any dialogue with the Department of Basic Education was further stifled during this period. Changes to curriculum had to be speedily implemented so that learning could continue. Teaching of subjects like Mathematics, Languages and Sciences was prioritised as specified outcomes were set by the Department of Basic Education and some of these subjects were content based so specialised teaching was needed to bridge the gap of time lost in classes. Subjects like Creative Arts and Life Skills appeal to the aesthetic level of learners and this was used to revive learners' love of school during a period marked by fear and uncertainty. Specialised teachers used their influence and knowledge of these subjects to draw out learners love for learning during these lessons by ensuring they engaged in creative and fun activities.

GETTING READY FOR A NEW NORMAL

When the announcement was made for schools to reopen in May and June, we started to make structural changes at Rainbow Primary to ensure safety became a priority. My deputy principal has been a tower of strength during this time as he and I began to put plans in place to ensure there were sufficient watering stations, social distancing markings in and out of the classroom to ensure all protocols were factored in. It was a mammoth task to undertake, and we had the unions breathing down our necks drawing on the power they possess over labour because they wanted to come and check our readiness to open school. Thankfully years of savings through steady school fee collections and fundraising projects had placed us in a favourable position to finance these changes at school. Eventually when the Department of Basic Education did provide guidelines, we had to decide how many children we were going to bring in at a time. We opted for the rotational model and had fifty percent of the school report on alternate days. This meant that each class would be divided into two groups with each group reporting on an alternate day. This required the removal of furniture from classes to allow for social distancing, relooking at timetables since learners will now be expected to

complete work that was previously set for five days in ten days. We worked together as a team to plan work so that in the time that learners were at school, they will cover additional concepts for example instead of covering five activities in a subject, it will be eight activities. This ensured they did not fall even further behind and lose the opportunity of breaking the chains we worked so hard to do all these years. We had to look at breaks and how we managed learners when they were outdoors. We had to alternate times between the different phases so that there was sufficient space for all of them during their breaks.

PLANNING OUR WAY BACK

Making all these changes to how we did things required a lot of planning and consulting. As a principal while I had to work within policy and procedures from the Department of Basic Education, I had to allay the fears of my team as well. I had to draw on the power I possessed as leader of the school to keep my team safe but fulfil my role as Department of Basic Education liaison. There were educators who had comorbidities and we had to factor that into the equation and ensure duties were equitably distributed without disadvantaging anyone. Educators were also scared so I had to allay their fears. I had to assure them that they were safe at school and that we will get through this. There were many brainstorming sessions where we would go back and forth because as a leader I believe in consultation. I would conduct these brainstorming sessions first with my management team since they were the authority over curriculum matters. Then we would meet with the full staff complement who are the authority figures within the classroom. I chose to brainstorm first with my managers so that we could look at issues from a leadership perspective and then with the staff so we could ascertain their views as they were the implementers. My team was on the ground, so I needed to hear what they felt worked and what did not. So, we would meet on the one-day and outline some of the areas we need to look at for example how they felt about the breaks or the introduction of resource packs. I would allow them to go home think about it, consult with peers in other schools and come back with ideas that we could implement. We would try certain practices then review with the team if it was working or if we need to revisit the practice. I also felt that parents needed to feel confident that we were doing the best for their children so what was happening in one grade must be happening in the other grades.

It was during the brainstorming sessions that the element of person before the organisation began to crop its head to some degree. Educators initially were not willing to embrace the

changes that this new normal of Covid-19 required by prioritising their personal safety in terms of questioning how they would supervise learner work through one-on-one contact required during teaching and learning as well as supervision of tasks through marking of books. Fortunately, these sessions allowed for educators to share their fears at this forum and through engagement with the leaders these personal concerns were alleviated speedily and not transferred to learners and learning processes. Through the process of workshopping educators on ‘curriculum with care’ educators once again realised the importance of their role at school, especially when it came to how they dealt with learners during this time.

LENDING A HAND – WORKING WITHIN OUR COMMUNITY

Schools are also a pathway to provide meals to communities and Rainbow Primary was fortunate enough to be included in the Department of Basic Education’s National School Nutrition Programme (NSNP) toward the latter part of 2020. We were able to make food hampers and distribute to families within the school community. However, Rainbow Primary services learners from the broader areas on the outskirts of the Phoenix township where the majority of our learners who require these hampers reside. We found it a challenge to reach these families due to Covid-19 restrictions initially as during this stage of school reopening travel was limited in order to minimise the spread of the virus. When learners physically returned to school, we were better able to assist them with the NSNP. The heartache I still hold within me is the knowledge that my learners were unable to access these meals prior to us being included in this programme.

KEEPING OUR CHILDREN HAPPY AND SAFE

Covid-19 has left indelible scars on my school community. This is a community that has been left oppressed for many years due to socio-economic conditions that exist. The scars of this oppression were very visible when our learners came back to school. It was visible in their physical and emotional condition. Some had become withdrawn due to issues at home as a result of increased unemployment and retrenchments that were now even more rife in the community. Our once happy bubbly children were quieter because the focus had shifted from learning to wondering whether their basic needs of food and shelter would be met and for how long. The visible difference in the morale of the children tore at my heart daily. As a

school we worked tirelessly to try and reduce the burden on our children by adopting the idea of ‘curriculum with care’ in this way lessen their focus on their home environment and ensure school was their happy place. The idea of ‘curriculum with care’ allowed educators to not place too much emphasis on only driving the curriculum but also encompassed lessons that allowed learners to share their experiences so that learners would also know that they were not alone. Teachers were encouraged to use the authority they had in class to alter the mood and tone to a more open and free learning environment. School became their happy place because they could now come to us to learn but school also became an escape from the difficult circumstances, they were facing in their home environment. Evidence of this was clear in their enthusiasm to attend school more regularly.

COVID-19 AS A GATEWAY TO A NEW NORMAL

As someone who thrives on change, I grabbed this opportunity that Covid-19 brought with both hands. I know very little about technology compared to my children or even some of my team members, so I count myself as illiterate when it comes to technology something as a figure of authority I now see as a weakness. I am able to use my computer for basic aspects, but I sit amazed at some of the ways in which technology transforms our world. So, when we needed to interact with our parent community during the lockdown it was this new way of doing things through technology that we turned to. We started to communicate with parents through social media in order to support our learners in their learning. But alas due to the fact that Rainbow Primary is situated within a township that is a mix of socio-economic households, many parents could not be reached, and this was yet another bridge we had to cross. Through this the shortage of finances within this community became another visible form of oppression we had to encounter. We persevered and provided hard copies of resource packs that learners could collect, or we even did home visits to drop off packs. This helped keep learning alive for many of our children and ensured that children had equal access to learning material.

TECHNOLOGICAL DIVIDE

With the advent of remote learning becoming prevalent at school, we tried to introduce some level of online teaching. This was something that some teachers found challenging especially as many of our staff members are from previously racially disadvantaged groups. Our school governing body then stepped in to support us as they provided personnel to communicate with parents via social media. We were not fortunate like some schools to run online classes

where there was contact between the learner and educator on a one-on-one basis, so technology was seen as something the elite only benefited from during this period, but we were able to open doors of communication between the school and parent to some degree via this platform. As a grandparent who observed my grandchildren during online learning at home, I think I am old school and prefer the direct classroom contact. I felt learners are not fully engaged in activities in this platform and are easily distracted as the figure of authority in the class is not physically visible to learners. But as a principal I cannot overemphasise the importance of being technologically aware especially with the direction education is moving in. I believe when appointing principals this should be a prerequisite and technological training should be an essential part of teacher development in all schools. In the event of schools and school leaders not addressing this speedily, technological illiteracy may become a stronger force of oppression to schools in townships.

KEEPING LEARNING GOING

As a leader who accepted the challenge of Covid-19 as a steppingstone to a new normal, I learnt that as a principal who survived this turbulent time we can achieve through the strength of collaborating, trusting, and supporting each other. As a leader I possess much power over my subordinates, but I believe a leader is as strong as the team she leads. Seeing myself as a mentor to my team I feel that I drew on the power I possess to offer them many opportunities to uncover their true potential. My hope is that through developing within them intrinsic motivation, they can carry the baton forward. As principal I have endeavoured to use my clout to encourage critical thinking and debate within our school structure therefore, I believe that Covid-19 has helped us at Rainbow Primary become stronger together. When we see the child at the beginning of the year and then review his or her accomplishments (no matter how big or small) at the end of the year we know as a school we have drawn on the power we have over our learners to make these changes possible. I believe as a captain of this ship who used the influence I possess, I have managed to steady this ship through this turbulent period. I know under the circumstances we at Rainbow Primary have done the best we could. Yes on introspection we could always do better, but we did very well.

This period solidified for me the role of family and my faith. We learnt the importance of tolerance, the value of life and appreciating every opportunity. I am appreciative of the opportunity to be able to say that I did not sit on the side lines but that I was an active participant in this historic time using my position as leader to make an impact. We did not

succumb to the negativity that was engulfing the world, but we made a difference. When I reflect on the lessons I learnt, one key lesson was that I realised how fragile life is, especially for our children. Parents and teachers try to act as support structures possessing power as authority figures in the lives of these children and working toward liberating them, but they are limited by the socio-economic conditions they themselves are faced with due to the history of oppression this community is faced with as a result of their race. Learners in this school community were further disadvantaged by Covid-19 as learning losses experienced due to lack of access to technology. While we at Rainbow Primary tried as much as possible to bridge the divide, we could not compensate for the historical disadvantage our community is placed in. It will take many years for our community to recover from this catastrophe. The divide between the rich and poor has most certainly got wider with this pandemic.

WHAT LIES AHEAD

The most powerful lesson I take from this experience is that now that we have survived this period thus far, we will be able to take on other challenges we face. We are trying our best by going the extra mile in ensuring that as the figures of authority in the class teachers offer the best lessons. We can under the circumstances ensure soon that our learners will be liberated from the circumstances they currently find themselves in. We have made amendments to how we deliver lessons, for example while majority of schools in the area do not have their grade sevens in school daily, we have ensured they are here every day. We have also managed to catch-up on all learning losses they experienced as a result of rotational classes in 2020 and are now where they should be in terms of curriculum coverage in grade seven. We hope to ensure this filters through our other grades at school. We can only achieve this with support from the Department of Basic Education through ensuring we receive increased funding to sustain us as a school as a lack of finances keeps us from breaking the cycle of oppression in this township. We are unable to sustain our finances due to non-payment of school fees and other avenues we previously used to sustain our school as a result of the pandemic. The need for stability with the curriculum changes is also a matter we hope the Department of Basic Education will support us with. With a curriculum still steeped in an oppressive past of chalk and talk and a lack of technological access to township schools like Phoenix, we hope this opportunity Covid-19 offers, learning can be focused on liberating our children sooner. We now also look to the vaccination programme as a vehicle to try and stabilise schools once more. With the prospect of teachers getting vaccinated we remove some of the apprehension they feel while in class and they may be able to perform optimally once more.

4.3 MR GOVIND'S STORY: FROM ALPHA MALE TO TEAM PLAYER

Mr Govind's story plays out like scenes from a movie. Having been placed in new challenges at every stage, he shows his innate leadership skills through various stages in his life, flourishing at every stage.

LEADING FROM AN EARLY AGE

I was born in Pinetown in KwaZulu-Natal and later moved into a quieter town towards the midlands of KwaZulu-Natal, where I spent a major part of my childhood. My dad who is late now was someone who was not well educated himself but instilled in us the value of education in liberating us from the chains holding us down as people of Indian descent. As the eldest of five children, it was my responsibility to set the precedence for my siblings to become independent and educated members of society as was the norm in our society for males to fulfil such duties. I was always a leader, whether in the classroom or the sports field. I thrived in taking charge, so I learnt the importance of power from an early age. I always achieved academically, and I believe this brought great pride to my dad. Upon completion of my schooling, I received a bursary to study teaching at one of the only teacher training colleges at the time for Indians due to the political situation in our country during that period.

My first appointment as a teacher took me to a small rural town in the then Northern Transvaal. I walked into the small school as a newly qualified teacher, but I had to quickly put on the cap of acting principal as the new principal had not arrived at the school. I thrived in this new role and under the guidance of who we termed 'inspectors' I learnt many important duties that principals fulfilled very quickly. In those days these 'inspectors' drew a lot of power over subordinates as they represented figures of authority over all staff within the school and I felt favoured to be guided by such figures of authority. Since this was a small school and when the principal did arrive a week later, I supported him by filling in many other roles, one of which was as a mentor teacher (the principal chose me) to a fellow colleague who was also a new teacher. So, my leadership role started very early in my career and I began to see the importance of having influence over others in a work environment.

BEING THE ALPHA

After four years the opportunity to come closer home finally arrived and I grabbed it. I was transferred to a school in Durban but my time there was short lived because after just nine months I was declared additional to the staff complement and had to move to another school. It was at this school in the central part of the Phoenix township that I grew further as a leader. As the only male foundation phase specialist placed in a school with transforming leadership, I was offered the opportunity to act as head of department and within months acting deputy principal. Here I was the thorn among the roses as the staff complement was dominated by female educators. I'm not sure if it was this that opened many doors for me in those early days as senior management comprised of mostly male. I remember in those days there were very few opportunities for women to hold positions of power and even though I was a young educator I was given the opportunity to manage females more senior and experienced than me. I was appointed as deputy principal within a short period, but I had to take over as acting principal as the school was now without one. During the transition period as these long serving leaders were making their exit from the profession, I was grateful to be taken under their wing and groomed for leadership of the school. Leadership in those days showed me that as a leader I commanded a lot of influence and to be a strong leader I had to use this power to my advantage in order to manage my subordinates. As a young leader I was also very fortunate to have an extremely supportive wife who allowed me to grow at work while she managed our home. For thirty-three years my wife has been my greatest strength, especially because being an educator herself she supported me while I chased my goals.

FLYING SOLO

In 2002 I became principal of Freedom Primary. Becoming a principal after approximately thirteen years in the profession had become quite a feather in my cap. I felt that I was unbeatable, and this definitely drove my leadership style in the early days. My earlier experiences with leaders demonstrated to me the significant role the authority I held over those I now led. I felt I was unstoppable, and school took over the essence of my very life. I wanted Freedom Primary to be the best primary school in the township of Phoenix. I wanted to use my influence as principal to ensure others saw Freedom Primary as a symbol of strength. It was at this stage I learnt that behind every successful man is most certainly a supportive wife. She was the manager of our home bringing up our two daughters almost on

her own as was traditional practice in many Indian homes at that time. I got to be two different people at this stage – a domineering leader at work but an obedient husband at home. I saw the benefits of the power I held and I felt empowered by it. I was definitely less powerful at home as I was the rose at home because they have surrounded me with love and strength during this new phase of leadership in my life. I was also very fortunate as a leader that my vision was something that a few others at Freedom Primary also cottoned onto. Initially it was two young female educators who shared my vision and once again I was the thorn amongst the roses working at creating something visionary.

When I walked into Freedom Primary, I decided to turn things around. I knew the position I now held brought with it a lot of power and responsibility. But I did not plan to stay too long because I was a leader on the move, especially as this is what I had grown accustomed to. So, I targeted the key area I knew would make the most impact – school finances. My experience with leadership showed me the leverage financial success brought as more money meant more leverage in the community. In township schools money is very hard to come by, especially in a community like the one Freedom Primary served. I was going to show the world that anything was possible with a good leader who is able to use the leverage he had effectively. I achieved this to some degree. The finances grew rapidly because I worked my team tirelessly pushing them to do more by drawing on the authority I commanded over them. I became a sort of dictator determining everything that happened at school. I wanted my say in every decision that was taken by drawing on the authority I had over my subordinates. I remember days where I stood in the carpark checking the time educators got to school then checking what time they went into class. I used my capacity as principal to ensure those reporting to me knew I was in control.

A NEW WAY OF LEADING

Fortunately, approximately eight years ago, I realised that I did not want to be that type of leader. We were able to improve the product we offered to this community and over the eighteen years that I am now head of Freedom Primary, we have become one of the most sort after primary schools in this area but as time passed and staff changed, younger people entered the gates of Freedom Primary. These are the people that now drive the goals and vision of our school which is collaborative teams ensuring we ignite and sustain the flame of wisdom. I realised that I could also use the power I had in a positive way to influence my team to still achieve these goals. I am not sure if it is age or my awe of these young

professionals that helped make me a better leader. Things that use to irk me no longer do. It is not that I am now a ‘softy’ as I still demand a certain standard of work and I still have very high expectations of my team. Whatever it is, I am grateful because it was this culture that they brought to Freedom Primary pre-Covid-19 that steadied the ship for us. I am grateful that the dogmatic leaders I worked with in my early days was only for a very short time, so they did not leave an ineradicable mark on my leadership because I believe I am a better leader now than I was then. I am grateful that I learnt that the authority I hold may be also used to liberate people we lead and not just control them. I was always a visionary leader, but I believe I have become a better leader because most of my team now want to emulate my leadership style. They see the influence I yield over them as a positive and now know that I endeavour to help them break the chains that an oppressive leadership may bring.

OUR SCHOOL COMMUNITY

Freedom Primary as a school is based in a township riddled with unemployment and poverty among other social ills. Even under these conditions I am fortunate that Freedom Primary has established quite a strong relationship with the community. The historical disadvantage that this community struggles with is one of the cycles that as a school we travail to change. As a school I believe we have earned the faith and trust of this community. I know this because when we have to make decisions with regard to school fee increases or selection of parents to serve on our school governing body, we don’t face any challenges with decisions that are taken. They have faith that we use the authority that school leaders hold to improve conditions for their children. Aside from one member on our school governing body who displayed a lack of support by challenging our decisions, we have the full support of our parent component. Since we aspire to be a democratic school, we allow this member to question and challenge us but because we at Freedom Primary always work within policy frameworks, we know we are doing the best for our school community. This individual tried to utilise the power he held as a leader within the school governing body to create tension and restrains. These challenges that individuals bring also help to grow us as an organisation focused on providing the best quality education for the families in this community. I have therefore demonstrated to my school governing body and staff that although we may have authority over others, this authority must be used to emancipate this community and not continue to keep them enslaved.

EVERYTHING PAUSES FOR A WHILE

Pre-Covid-19 Freedom Primary had established a culture of collaboration and teamwork. Tasks allocated were given to team members who had the freedom to drive tasks on their own. As leader I would collaborate at the outset of the task, but I allowed my team to take full control of the task. I know each members' strengths and weaknesses, as a result tasks are allocated so that they collaborate and balance each other. I ensured this balance was created building teams with varying skills and weaknesses. This enables them to learn and grow from each other. Then in March of 2020 team Freedom Primary and the world were faced with one of its biggest challenges when Covid-19 was declared a pandemic by the World Health Organisation. Schools around the world had to be abruptly closed for a period of time to curb the spread of the virus. There was a new power, an unseen power now controlling us.

WORKING BEHIND THE SCENES

While there was a lot of panic and uncertainty amongst schools and leaders of schools in our community, Freedom Primary remained steadfast. Why? Well, I was fortunate that at the outset of school closures in 2020 when the Department of Basic Education was developing a way forward, to have been consulted for input from the curriculum unit with regard to proposals to bring learners back to school. I am grateful that those in authority consulted with members on the ground to find workable solutions instead of simply instructing school leaders. During this school closure my team was here on plant, brainstorming a way forward for schools when we were allowed to come back. We drew up three proposals that could be used when schools reopened. The three proposals that we worked on were: alternate grade model - the option of alternate grade full day attendance – this meant all learners in two grades for example attend on one day and another two grades on the next day; alternate day model - classes be split into two groups and one group per class attends on alternate days; platoon model - classes with reduced time per subject whereby the first half of the class attends morning sessions and the second half attends afternoon sessions. I can proudly say that two of those three proposals presented by my team were included in the manual developed by the Department of Basic Education to be used by schools as part of the Standard Operating Procedures (SOP). With matters relating to curriculum changes there was no dialogue between the Department of Basic Education and school leaders. Amendments to curriculum were made via the Department of Basic Education and as a school we complied

with these changes. The amendments to the curriculum now merely allowed for fewer outcomes to be achieved and reduced number of assessment tasks.

READY TO OPEN

The fact that we had already started planning for school reopening at a very early stage, we were well prepared when it was time to open again in May and June of 2020. My team was on the plant weeks before schools could open making structural adjustments by ensuring the new SOP was in place. There was the element of fear among my team, but through my influence as principal Team Freedom Primary felt that they would be much safer at school once all procedures and protocols were met. We had been having team meetings to decide on our way forward before directive from the Department of Basic Education. As a leader who used my influence to guide staff, we were already collaborating on what would be the best model for Team Freedom Primary. This was when we selected the alternate day model whereby fifty percent of our learners will report to school on alternate days. This meant that a class that had forty learners for example, twenty learners became group one, and the other twenty learners became group two. They would then attend school on alternate days in their groups. This required amendments to the timetable so that learners were not disadvantaged and received the same amount of instruction time across the grade.

We also had to revisit our break and dismissal times so that learners were not unnecessarily exposed to others. This then required teacher duties to be relooked at with teachers now going on ground duty and dismissal duty more than the traditional times. Like every team, not every member is a team player, so I did have certain members of staff who were not happy about the additional responsibilities they were required to take on. These members of staff were not happy that they had to now report to school earlier than usual, assist with screening and go out on additional times for ground duty. But due to the influence I maintained over staff and the fact that there were twenty-eight others who were willing to work as a team, this did not deter me. As the principal of the school I ensured these educators fulfilled their prime role functions and that was sufficient for me as a leader. I had a bigger team willing to put their best foot forward and always go the extra mile to ensure we achieved more than was required.

KEEPING EVERYONE SAFE

There was a lot of talk in the media about the Department of Basic Education's provision of personal protective equipment (PPE), but we opted to dip into our reserves and provide PPE

for both educators and learners. I am glad that all the years of work we had accomplished as a team had provided us with an advantage during the days ahead. I had used the sway I had to ensure we were not further enslaved by financial chains. The additional savings we had built through ongoing fundraising initiatives gave us a healthy financial position where we were now able to make Freedom Primary safe for our educators and learners. We not only ensured that the school was demarcated according to social distancing requirements inside and outside classes, but we had made structural changes, provided PPE (including face shields) for each learner, and paid our additional educators and support staff during the days when school was closed. I was determined to ensure that my school community was not going to be trapped in the economic disadvantage that so many township schools faced.

MY TEAM – MY STRENGTH

My team worked tirelessly in the days prior to the opening with my support staff back at work one month in advance to ensure the school was sanitised and safe for our return. Training programmes were devised without waiting for detailed guidelines from the Department of Basic Education. My managers used their strength to ensure we were not disadvantaged any further. Our teams researched required protocols and drew up training programmes to prepare our teachers for what was expected. As classroom figures of authority teachers had to be armed with setting a new culture within the class and influence learners to adhere strictly to this new way. We had teams to oversee the various duties from sanitising to screening to networking. This is when our culture of teamwork and collaboration was highlighted. We allocated duties to the various teams and they just ran with it by using their clout to keep everyone safe and informed. The technological team brought tears to my eyes with a video that they prepared to show parents that Team Freedom Primary was ready to welcome our children back. Teachers were in school at quarter to seven everyday so that screening could be done and contact time in the classrooms could be maximised. We had endeavoured to not be limited by the new power of an unseen enemy. When we were ready to open school, we had visits from the Department of Basic Education and Health to give us the go-ahead to do so. In every organisation we have challenges and once again we had a member of our school governing body challenging our readiness and finances. As a leader who works within the scope of policy and procedure, I was confident in the readiness of school to allow this member to take measurements to assess social distancing requirements were being met and view documentation questioning our teams' efforts. He had to agree with the Department of Basic Education and Health with our preparedness to open school.

TECHNOLOGY AS A COMMUNICATION TOOL

It was during this time that I was also growing as a leader, I learnt about the benefits of technology as a method of communication. I was not going to allow this new force taking over to keep me or my school community in chains. Prior to Covid-19 Freedom Primary only communicated with our parent community via school circulars. But with the advent of Covid-19 we had to seek out other avenues and this is where my young team members shone. They introduced me to the power of social media platforms which we used to bridge the gap between the school and the community. We were having online meetings on a regular basis - in this way decisions were made faster. Parents were kept abreast of the happenings at school and their confidence in the school's safety programme grew. Bearing in mind this school is based in a township with varying socio-economic conditions as a result of their historical disadvantage, we had to cater for learners who were unable to access the school on these online platforms to ensure they were not further disadvantaged going forward. Freedom Primary firmly believes in not disadvantaging any group, so we had to cater for hard copies of work to be collected from school for those learners unable to access social media. We found that because learners were receiving work to complete at home, attendance to school dropped. We decided to suspend resource packs and, in this way, motivate children to come regularly to school. I am proud to say that this process bore much fruit as we were able to bring most (if not all learners per grade) back to the class so that they too could become accustomed to the new culture of doing things at school. Even during the lockdown when schools were closed, teachers developed fun activities (evident on my collage) for learners to forward to school. In this way we were offering quality education even in the face of a worldwide pandemic.

FEEDING NOT JUST THEIR MINDS

Our school is not a beneficiary of the NSNP programme due to our quintile ranking. Our quintile ranking was set by the Department of Basic Education as quintile five and as a result we receive very little funding from the Department of Basic Education, however we are aware of the difficulties our school community faces on a regular basis. Unemployment and poverty are rife in many homes in this community. Prior to Covid-19 I used my authority as school leader to network with local faith-based organisations to ensure learners received a healthy lunch on a daily basis. During school closures as a result of the national lockdown Freedom Primary once again tapped into those networks. We were able to assist our school

community with food hampers that were distributed from school in order to attempt to break the chain of poverty engulfing this community. We know the difficulties our parents experience in this community and because we are a team that cares about the holistic development of our children, we knew Team Freedom Primary would not sit on the side lines while our children slept hungry.

GROWING AS A LEADER

I think my biggest gain as a leader in these past few years is the young minds that are now part of my team. I feel very blessed as a leader to now have under my wing young leaders. I can call them leaders because I believe some of them can perform better than existing school leaders. They are a new breed of leaders who have shown me so many things: technology makes life less complicated; you don't have to breathe down on someone to get a task done, leadership success comes from team success. As a leader I have also learnt to use my authority to strengthen my team by mentoring them to become transformative leaders working toward liberating this historically disadvantaged community we serve. Covid-19 has made me appreciate the tangible benefits of technology and not allow it to become another power that dominates me. I now firmly believe that every principal must be technologically efficient so that he or she uses technology as a power to freely engage with others. This should actually be a prerequisite for becoming a school leader going into the future, especially with the direction schools are moving. My mornings are now spent first of all going through all my emails before I do anything else as this is how all communication is now done at school, so as you can see, I will not be kept in chains by this emerging power. I am grateful to my team for teaching me little tricks on how to use even this basic (I can now say basic) tool.

This period has taught me the value of my family. Previously school was my only priority but with the closeness with which my family experienced Covid-19 (my daughter had tested positive) I learnt to be more hands on with my family. Now when my family needs me it is no longer just my wife who takes over, we are a team. The leader that I am now at school has most certainly impacted the parent and husband I now am. I think the confidence I have in my team has impacted that. I know they can manage activities without me, so I do not need to be as hands on as I used to be. My office is not just my jurisdiction any longer; various key team members are fully aware of where everything is and so they can ensure the school is running efficiently. I have also ensured that they have learnt the importance of the influence

they hold over others is not only beneficial to them as leaders, but it is to redeem those in their care as well. This I believe are the characteristics of a good leader.

I know I have most certainly grown as a leader. This I saw just recently when I had a new educator come crying to my office because she could not meet a deadline. Reports were due to be issued to parents that afternoon and she had a technical glitch with her laptop, and she was unable to have them ready on time. I was able to use my influence as principal to calm her and offer her a solution that was to her advantage so that she did not feel limited because of a situation beyond her control. I remember her words to me that Friday morning in March, she said, “You are nothing like what I heard about you!” I advised her to use our social media platform to advise parents about the delay. Come Monday morning at seven thirty she was in my office ready to deliver her reports. This incident reminded me that my influence should not be used to keep my staff fearful but free to approach me when they felt restrained. Two lessons I take from this incident: technology must be used to help alleviate communication woes as we received not a single query from parents with regard to the delay; authority with care helps build more confident and hardworking teams. So Covid-19 and my teams’ way of doing things has helped me realise that life is fragile, we should help and support each other reach where we need to be.

LOOKING AHEAD

Going forward into the future as a leader I feel the Department of Basic Education needs to view this crisis as a building block for how they support schools. As figures of authority, they should use their influence to alleviate fears being experienced at schools currently. I fear this pandemic has placed undue pressure on schools to manage on their own. Should this pandemic continue any longer, Freedom Primary will be sailing in unsteady waters as we are unable to provide financial support much longer to endure this storm. The financial inequalities that currently exist in township schools must not be used as a mechanism to keep schools oppressed. The Department of Basic Education, I am optimistic needs to provide guidelines on how they will assist schools to manage their financial burdens.

The burden that this crisis has placed on learning cannot be underestimated. At Freedom Primary we have noted a marked decline in learner performance in critical thinking subjects like Mathematics, English and Natural Science. Learners are not performing as well as they previously used to due to the lengthy interruptions at schools due to the pandemic. The lack

of access to online learning for our learners did not allow for us as a school to interact with our children for lengthy periods during the lockdown. This could also be a reason why learner performance declined. Aesthetic subjects like Creative Arts and Life Orientation have continued to keep learners engaged in learning as we note learner performance in those subjects remain at similar levels as prior to the pandemic period. We also noted that learners did engage in learning on their own in aesthetic subjects by completing projects while at home. Learners did experience learning challenges with work relating to critical thinking subjects when they had to work on their own as parents were unable to guide their learning.

I am optimistic about the current vaccination programme that is being rolled out for educators across the country. This will most certainly help alleviate some of the uncertainty educators are experiencing with regard to safety at school and we hope to go back to some sort of normality soon after. This will go a long way in mitigating some of the burdens being placed on principals as persons of authority in schools. This will allow us to activate plans we have on how to gain on curriculum losses our children at Freedom Primary have experienced.

4.4 CONCLUSION

In this chapter I presented the storied narratives of two principals leading township schools. In their narratives they shared experiences as leaders prior to Covid-19, how they faced the challenge of the pandemic and their hopes for a way forward. Data was generated through narrative interviews and collage inquiry. In Chapter Five I will share the next segment of my data analysis, which is the analysis of narratives.

CHAPTER FIVE

CLAWING THROUGH A NEW PATH: ANALYSIS OF NARRATIVES

5.1 INTRODUCTION

In the previous chapter the focus was on the first level of analysis being the narrative analysis. I presented the stories of my two participants namely, Mrs Adam and Mr Govind. I was assisted in developing the narratives by both these participants. In this chapter I move to the second level of analysis where I will deconstruct their narratives. I will use the research puzzle outlined in Chapter One to direct my analysis of these narratives. The research puzzle comprised:

MAIN PUZZLE

What are the lived experiences of primary school principals leading township schools in transforming school culture during the Covid-19 pandemic?

SUB-PUZZLE

1. How do school principals lead and manage the process of transforming school culture during the Covid-19 pandemic?
2. Why do school principals lead and manage the transformation of school culture during the Covid-19 pandemic in the way they do?

In order to answer the research sub-puzzle, I will refer to the analytical framework set out in Chapter Three. I will commence with sub-puzzle one where I will analyse how school principals led and managed the process of transforming school culture during the Covid-19 pandemic. Thereafter, I will move to sub-puzzle two in order to deconstruct why school principals led and managed the transformation of school culture during the Covid-19 pandemic in the way they did. The analysis of these sub-puzzles will be conducted with the assistance of Burns' (1978) transformational leadership theory and Charles Handy's (1986) organisational leadership theory unpacked in chapter two. I continue to use the metaphor of comparing the pandemic to a marathon and in this chapter titled 'Clawing through a new

path' I endeavour to show how my participants were able to achieve their goals in a time of turbulence through intense hard work and commitment. I will show the reader through the analysis of these narratives how the type of leadership and culture in schools allow leaders to lead and manage schools under crisis situations.

5.2 SUB-PUZZLE ONE: HOW DO SCHOOL PRINCIPALS LEAD AND MANAGE THE PROCESS OF TRANSFORMING SCHOOL CULTURE DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC?

To answer this sub-puzzle, I have identified two themes: changing leadership style and motivation and collaboration. These themes emerged from Burns' (1978) transformational leadership theory where he showed how leaders lead by establishing vision, empowering followers, encouraging, and developing followers to change their capabilities and challenge the existing culture in this way bringing about change. Aided by Handy's (1986) organisational culture theory (which identified role, power, person and task cultures in developing organisations) further guided the choice of themes.

5.2.1 CHANGING LEADERSHIP STYLE

Successful school leaders have long-term visions for their organisations and are adept at managing change and implementing strategies that will ensure long-term success (Gurr & Drysdale, 2020). This strategy of managing change promotes a shared leadership model in which school leaders and staff collaborate on key practices (Pepper, 2010). To maintain successful schools, they understand that crisis and change management are imperative. I set forth my findings under two sub-themes identified in the framework outlined in chapter three (see section 3.6.2.1, p. 41) of this study, namely: the old versus the new and the role of technology. The sub-themes emerged through the thematic analysis process presented in Chapter Three (see section 3.6.2.1, p. 41), which has allowed me to analyse, organise, describe and report on themes (Nowell et al., 2017) I have found within the data generated.

5.2.1.1 THE OLD VERSUS THE NEW

While schools had existing practices that they systematically followed over the years, to adapt to the pandemic, new methods of doing things and existing routines were reorganised

into new practices (Naicker & Chikoko, 2021) in this way transforming the culture at schools. As leaders who took great pride in how their schools were led and managed, both Mrs Adam and Mr Govind detailed how the prevailing culture and their leadership style ensured their schools were functioning optimally. Mrs Adam referred to advance preparations in areas of curriculum, co-curricular and extra-curricular planning. Mrs Adam explains:

We established certain ways of achieving this by ensuring preparation of all activities be it curriculum implementation, co-curricular or extra-curricular programmes planning was done well in advance. (Chapter 4, p. 50).

Mr Govind indicated that Covid-19 presented no major challenge as they had been working under an established culture of advance planning and preparation. Mr Govind expounded:

While there was a lot of panic and uncertainty amongst schools and leaders of schools in our community, Freedom Primary remained steadfast. Why? Freedom Primary had an established culture of working in advance whether it was curriculum or extra-curricular activities (Chapter 4, p. 61)

Their existing leadership style which was open to change, work ethos and culture of collaboration ensured that when the new SOPs were introduced, staff were able to draw on their established way of doing things in order to adapt quickly. Even with the introduction of the new normal like the rotational attendance plan that both schools selected, whereby fifty percent of learners in each class reported to school on alternate days; planning and preparation in advance helped to facilitate day to day teaching and learning practices.

The manner in which organisations respond to crisis situations depends on the prevailing leadership style and organisational culture (Bowers, et al., 2017), which was clearly evident at both schools. The leaders in this study had established an organisational culture through their leadership style that encouraged members of their teams to plan effectively and well in advance. This allowed them to adjust when crisis situations arrived as they could adapt their plans and continue with teaching and learning under the pandemic conditions. Role culture as presented by Handy (1986) was at play during the period of transitioning from old conditions to a new normal. The roles allocated to various members on the teams by Mr

Govind and Mrs Adam helped influence how processes to be implemented were conducted. Mrs Adam pointed out how this was achieved:

Everyone on my team knew exactly what their role was and what was expected of them. Management members used their influence to consult but ensure policies were adhered to. Curriculum policies changed over the years, but we were able to adapt to the changes because everyone knew they had to be adaptable to change. (Chapter 4, p. 50).

Mr Govind relates how Freedom Primary realised this:

We had teams to oversee the various duties from sanitising to screening to networking. This is when our culture of teamwork and collaboration was highlighted. We allocated duties to the various teams and they just ran with it by using their clout to keep everyone safe and informed. (Chapter 4, p. 63).

Leaders in this study were able to influence their management teams based on their roles allocated (Cacciattolo, 2014) and managers in turn used their power to sway members to believe they had the freedom to action their expertise (Gibson, 1986). Using their power in relation to culture prevailing, they inadvertently or even directly followed what leaders deemed necessary to implement new processes (Gibson, 1986).

5.2.1.2 THE ROLE OF TECHNOLOGY

With the advent of Covid-19 most schools had to adapt to the change from traditional classroom-based learning to virtual classrooms. Sadly, the majority of South African learners experienced difficulty with making this transition (Mahaye, 2020) as their lack of access to sufficient finances hampered the purchase of adequate data required to access virtual learning. Digital colonisation and the digital divide played an immense role in major inconsistencies in home learning (Harris, 2020) as is clear in both schools in this study. These principals were mainly able to use technology to open channels of communication and not virtual learning. This environment also required school leaders to improve their own technological acumen (Harris & Jones, 2020) which these principals outlined as an area both

Mrs Adam and Mr Govind had to develop in order to adapt to the technological changes their schools required.

Mrs Adam and Mr Govind were emphatic about the role technology played during this time. As leaders they believe that technology is imperative to the changing face of education and as leaders principals must have a thorough knowledge of technology. Mrs Adam clarifies:

But as a principal I can't overemphasise the importance of being technologically aware especially with the direction education is moving in. I believe when appointing principals this should be a prerequisite and technological training should be an essential part of teacher development in all schools. In the event of schools and school leaders not addressing this speedily, technological illiteracy may become a stronger force of oppression to schools in townships (Chapter 4, p. 55).

Mr Govind concurs here:

I now firmly believe that every principal must be technologically efficient so that he or she uses technology as a power to freely engage with others. This should actually be a prerequisite for becoming a school leader going into the future, especially with the direction schools are moving (Chapter 4, p. 65).

Rainbow Primary and Freedom Primary used technology as a mechanism to open doors of communication with the parent community. Prior to Covid-19 the majority of schools in this township communicated strictly via printed circulars. The prevailing culture encouraged limited technological access to these schools as parents were able to gain physical entry into the school in order to communicate with the principal or staff. The advent of Covid-19 forced leaders of schools to think differently about how they interact with their school community. Unfortunately, due to socio-economic conditions in both school communities, technology was limited to opening channels of communication only. Mrs Adam describes their experience at Rainbow Primary:

We were not fortunate like some schools to run online classes where there was contact between the learner and educator on a one-on-one basis, so technology was seen as something the elite only benefited

from during this period, but we were able to open doors of communication between the school and parent to some degree via this platform (Chapter 4, p. 54).

Mr Govind shares how the advent of technology gradually opened new ways of doing things at Freedom Primary:

We were having online meetings on a regular basis in this way decisions were made faster. Parents were kept abreast of the happenings at school and their confidence in the school's safety programme grew. Bearing in mind this school is based in a township with varying socio-economic conditions as a result of their historical disadvantage, we had to cater for learners who were unable to access the school on these online platforms to ensure they were not further disadvantaged going forward (Chapter 4, p. 64).

The prevailing socio-economic challenges disadvantaged the learners as they were unable to engage in online learning like the majority of advantaged schools had introduced. Parents from these school communities struggled with issues of unemployment and poverty and so their focus has been on meeting their basic needs of food and shelter and not data for digital learning. Transformational leadership prevailing at these schools encouraged innovative ways to overcome the challenges they were facing (van Dierendonck et al., 2013) as was evident when both principals used technology to do things differently. The significant role of both power and role cultures allowed these leaders to influence subordinates to think of channels to reach out to their learners during this time. Each of these principals used their positions to inspire their teams to look at how they could introduce their school communities to technological pathways albeit in very small ways.

Under the themes of school principals and Covid-19, school leadership and social justice in times of crisis as well as school principals as leaders in the 21st century (chapter 2); I reviewed how various researchers outlined the widened gap between the elite and poor by Covid-19 which becomes more real when looking at the lived-experiences of the two participants in this study. Amnesty International (2021) highlighted in detail how advantaged

schools were able to transition to digital learning and now this has further widened the gap leaving schools similar to Rainbow Primary and Freedom Primary with an increased disadvantage. The reality of digital colonisation has never been more evident (Simmons, 2015) than during this period with schools like Freedom Primary and Rainbow Primary only using technology to communicate with parents while more elite schools who are beneficiaries of the digital divide were better equipped to continue learning. Mr Govind reflects on this:

The lack of access to online learning for our learners did not allow for us as a school to interact with our children for lengthy periods during the lockdown. This could also be a reason why learner performance declined (Chapter 4, p. 67).

While countries like USA, Australia, Singapore among others were able to take learning to digital platforms rapidly (Brelsford et al., 2020; Ho & Tay, 2020; O' Connel & Clark, 2020; Sato, 2020), many countries like South Africa struggled to make digital learning a reality for the majority of children and schools like Rainbow Primary and Freedom Primary only benefited from technology as a communication tool. Critical theorists like Habermas pondered over the power technology could hold over the masses (Gibson, 1986; Feeberg, 1996) and this became a reality when Mrs Adam and Mr Govind had to turn to technology in order to reach out to the school communities as it was technology that became the only way to reach their parents and learners. These arguments around technology and power by these critical theorists came to life during the pandemic with technology continuing to be a form of domination used to exploit power (Gibson, 1986) by the elite over those deemed inferior schools in townships like Phoenix evident in this study. This period in our history has shown how the state as an institution of power has failed to address the disproportionate way in which technology has contributed to uneven development (Held, 1980) with township schools like Rainbow Primary and Freedom Primary not having sufficient finances to access digital learning. The influencers of power within schools as presented by this study have been unable to break the chain within the townships they serve as a result of this uneven access to technology that Mrs Adam and Mr Govind were only able to introduce it in a small way. These principals have also only seen the benefits of technology without identifying the power divide it is feeding (Feeberg, 1996). This development and rapid dependence of technology in education is also supporting this form of domination and exploitation in this way adapting rival forces into permitting to this status quo of privilege and oppression remaining at their schools (Gibson, 1986).

It is important for leaders to also inspire their teams through their own technological skills and display digital prowess to remain relevant (Fisher & Waller, 2013). Both principals in this study displayed limited digital prowess and were therefore reliant on the skills of their teams. Technological skill became a power of control over these leaders (Feeberg, 1996) as they had to now seek out technically proficient team members in order to perform basic leadership functions like contacting stakeholders through digital platforms. As Mrs Adam illustrates:

This was something that some teachers found challenging especially as many of our staff members are from previously racially disadvantaged groups. Our school governing body then stepped in to support us as they provided personnel to communicate with parents via social media (Chapter 4, p. 54).

With the advent of Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) these leaders must become more willing to encourage new ideas and skills development in themselves and their teams (Gurr & Drysdale, 2020; Harris & Jones, 2020). The lack of resources and technological skill may result in such leaders, who are already scrambling for basic amenities, (Zulu et al., 2019) to be left further behind.

5.2.2 MOTIVATION AND COLLABORATION

During crisis periods school leaders focus the majority of their leadership skills on motivating and alluring their subordinates and other stakeholders to collaborate and share information through concerted efforts in achieving targets (Harris, 2020). The sub-themes that emerged for my analysis include: influencing teams, policy and curriculum challenges and the influence of person culture. To place these themes in context of my analysis, I have referred to a thematic analysis identified in chapter two setting the background for this analysis.

5.2.2.1 INFLUENCING TEAMS

Crisis leadership necessitates the integration of talents, abilities, and characteristics that enable a leader to prepare for, respond to, and learn from a crisis (Dirani et al., 2020). They rely on the collective strength of the group (Azorin, 2020). Participants in this study were

vociferous over the level of collaboration, consultation and motivation that drove their respective teams during this crisis period. Mrs Adam outlined how meetings were held at various levels ranging from meetings first with managers, then management liaising with staff, also staff given time to reflect as well as the principal interacting on a one-on-one basis with staff members. She goes on to elaborate:

I would conduct these brainstorming sessions first with my management team since they were the authority over curriculum matters. Then we would meet with the full staff complement who are the authority figures within the classroom. I chose to brainstorm first with my managers so that we could look at issues from a leadership perspective and then with the staff so we could ascertain their views as they were the implementers (Chapter 4, p. 52).

Mr Govind spoke about his team being his strength during this period and how roles allocated to members played a significant part in ensuring school was ready to return to quality teaching and learning:

We had teams to oversee the various duties from sanitising to screening to networking. This is when our culture of teamwork and collaboration was highlighted. We allocated duties to the various teams and they just ran with it by using their clout to keep everyone safe and informed. (Chapter 4, p. 63).

Teams at various levels became the think tanks at these schools allowing for shared visions, collaboration and regular consultations. The significant role of principals collaborating with their teams in order to achieve school goals (Al-Ali et al., 2017; Jones & Harris, 2013) comes through clearly in this segment. Handy's (1993) view of collaboration is building task culture where individuals with certain interests and specialisation come together in these schools. This is what Mr Govind reflects on when he proudly shares the gains of the technological team, a group of individuals who came together to take on the task of introducing technology at Freedom Primary:

The technological team brought tears to my eyes with a video that they prepared to show parents that Team Freedom Primary was ready to welcome our children back (Chapter 4, p. 63).

There is some evidence of futuristic leadership (Gurr & Drysdale, 2020) were these principals allowed for decisive decision making by having teams research operational requirements not evident in local schools, use this information to workshop educators in order to be better prepared for the new normal at schools. Mr Govind elaborates:

Our teams researched required protocols and drew up training programmes to prepare our teachers for what was expected. As classroom figures of authority teachers had to be armed with setting a new culture within the class and influence learners to adhere strictly to this new way (Chapter 4, p. 63).

These leaders acted courageously by allowing their teams to lead and manage tasks in these times (Gurr & Drysdale, 2020; Harris & Jones, 2020). While some of their peers within the same school system benefited from available resources (Ho & Tay, 2020; Sato, 2020), these teams had to think out of the box and navigate their way through these storms. As much as these teams did navigate through difficult times, I believe that their full potential as a team was not harnessed. Researchers like Zhao (2020) and Harris (2020) advocated for leaders utilising this period to evaluate existing structures and systems. These leaders chose to continue to work within their same structures. While education systems maybe centrally controlled, individuals are not (Archer & Morgan, 2020). It would be hoped that these principals would have advocated for transformative agency in which these leaders would have formed transformative agentic teams to address developmental needs during this period (Archer, 1995) as opposed to reproductive agency which focuses on individual goals. They did engage in collective action and collaborative work (Zhao, 2020) however, Mr Govind and Mrs Adam did not capitalise on the group's ability to transform the work of their teams and its practices within these changing circumstances (Archer, 1995). I hoped they would have used this period to reimagine how their teams could be evaluated and used effectively to address existing structures within the school as structure and agency are intertwined and may reconceive each other (Archer & Morgan, 2020). Leaders used their influence only to motivate teams to work toward the SOPs and other systems dictated by the policymakers who

hold greater power over them. The cycle of power of superiority continued during this period without those being dominated (Held, 1980) using the opportunity Covid-19 provided of breaking this cycle. Principals and teachers can never interact as equals in respect of knowledge, wisdom, authority, or interests; but teachers should maximise opportunities as participants in common tasks and principals should accept teachers as creative and intelligent individuals to be nurtured (Gibson, 1986).

5.2.2.2 POLICY AND CURRICULUM CHANGES

Existing work techniques and cultural change are frequently put to the test in crisis situations and the crisis may cause a ‘jolt’ to the organisation or system forcing changes to traditional practices (Boonstra, 2013). Memorisation is a big part of traditional schooling. As a result, curriculum that promotes a more pragmatic approach, one that discourages prediction and encourages exploration, is required (Azorin, 2020). The South African education system has also consistently focused on this traditional way of memorisation (Fleisch, 2008) which was one of the key reasons learners were unable to adjust to remote learning.

Data revealed that Mr Govind had the opportunity to make input into some of the new policies being prepared for schools where he was able to put forward suggestions as to how learners should be brought back to school after school closed in March of 2020. He then followed directives set by the Department of Education as to the various new SOPs and curriculum changes to be implemented. Mr Govind elaborates:

Well, I was fortunate that at the outset of school closures in 2020 when the Department of Basic Education was developing a way forward, to have been consulted for input from the curriculum unit (Chapter 4, p. 61).

On the other hand, Mrs Adam as liaison officer between the Department of Basic Education and Rainbow Primary preferred to await directive from her seniors with regard to SOPs and curriculum adjustments. Once the SOPs became available the team at Rainbow Primary began their task of planning and implementing directives as has been the culture at the school over the years. Mrs Adam advises how her school complied:

We were at a loss initially because there was no guidance from the Department of Basic Education especially since Rainbow Primary

prides itself on working within policy and procedural guidelines. We consistently prescribe to the authority the Department of Basic Education wields over us as a school (Chapter 4, p. 50).

This is evidence that while Covid-19 provided the opportunity for policy makers and leaders to review existing processes (Azorin, 2020), the Department of Basic Education did not utilise the opportunity to review or restructure workable policies or curriculum in order to adjust to the prevailing learning difficulties experienced by learners at schools as curriculum was merely trimmed and thrust upon schools to implement. Mrs Adam explains:

The Department of Basic Education who wielded power over curriculum over the years, made amendments to the curriculum and as has been the practice at Rainbow Primary we implemented these changes as any dialogue with the Department of Basic Education was further stifled during this period. Changes to curriculum had to be speedily implemented so that learning could continue (Chapter 4, p. 51).

Mr Govind shares a similar view as Mrs Adam:

With matters relating to curriculum changes there was no dialogue between the Department of Basic Education and school leaders. Amendments to curriculum were made via the Department of Basic Education and as a school we complied with these changes (Chapter 4, p. 61).

Curriculum has consistently been imposed by government legislation and schools were merely implementers (Zhao,2020). This period offered the opportunity for school leaders to re-evaluate the curriculum being used at schools. However, leaders in this study awaited directives from government structures to merely amend SOPs and continue to implement curriculum as directed. An essential mechanism to determine the success of educational systems is through assessment programmes (Ehrin & Chapman, 2020). This period of the pandemic had opened the door for policy makers and leaders to revisit conventional assessment programmes conducted. However, both leaders in this study as well as policy makers did not take full advantage of this opportunity. Amendments to assessments merely

reduced the number of tasks in some subjects (Department of Basic Education, 2020) but this was once again without much input from curriculum implementers on the ground who were already struggling with achieving unrealistic curriculum goals during Covid-19. Mr Govind explains:

The amendments to the curriculum now merely allowed for fewer outcomes to be achieved and reduced number of assessment tasks (Chapter 4, p. 62).

With some schools like Freedom Primary attempting to conduct some assessments via online submission, majority of learners who had little or no access to these platforms were disadvantaged by such attempts. It was hoped that leaders will restructure how certain practices were conducted (Gurr & Drysdale, 2020) but this was not fully interrogated at these schools. Mr Govind shares how they adjusted activities:

Even during the lockdown when schools were closed, teachers developed fun activities (evident on my collage) for learners to forward to school using social media. In this way we were offering quality education even in the face of a worldwide pandemic (Chapter 4, p. 64).

Principals have the unfortunate task of being liaison between a more powerful structure in the form of the state and their subordinates (staff). So as leaders who report to a more powerful structure, any attempts at emancipating subordinates will come with limitations (Gibson, 1986). While these principals are placed in positions of power over their teams, they also face oppression from their superiors but they often become tolerant which bolsters and regulates domination and oppression (Gibson, 1986) as is evident in Mrs Adam's approach to how her school awaited directives from her superiors. Much dialogue could have taken place within accepted norms and offering expressive constraints but still offer progress in reviewing customary practices (Young, 1989), but as reflected from the data above, this was not the case at schools. Mrs Adam and Mr Govind are long-serving principals at their schools and had become tolerant of the leadership practices of their superiors, whereby they were implementers of policies and not familiar with practices that encouraged dialogue with seniors.

As human beings we are concerned with knowledge as it's a tool for communication (Held, 1980) and culture works in subtle ways to build dominant forms of power relationships

(Gibson,1986). Knowledge is necessary to emancipate and this is accessible via the school curriculum. The leaders in this study did not drive programmes in their individual schools that encouraged reviewing curriculum as a tool to address the emancipatory needs of learners in their particular schools. Mr Govind actually noted a decline in critical thinking subjects:

At Freedom Primary we have noted a marked decline in learner performance in critical thinking subjects like Mathematics, English and Natural Science. Learners are not performing as well as they previously used to due to the lengthy interruptions at schools due to the pandemic (Chapter 4, p. 67).

Rainbow Primary prioritised the teaching of critical thinking subjects as Mrs Adam elaborates:

Teaching of subjects like Mathematics, Languages and Sciences was prioritised as specified outcomes were set by the Department of Basic Education and some of these subjects were content based so specialised teaching was needed to bridge the gap of time lost in classes (Chapter 4, p. 51).

It is hoped that these schools continue to encourage critical thinking among learners and do not encourage a culture which focuses on certain practical subjects which may keep learners at a lower status and in this way trapped below the poverty line in these school communities (Gibson, 1986). It is evident that the curriculum has also been a measure for state structures to hold power over the masses (Held, 1980) as these schools were unable to make suggestions to possible changes to curriculum. With the lack of amendments to curriculum only schools with multiple resources were able to achieve learning outcomes while the state has used their power to further suppress disadvantaged schools by not encouraging adjustments to learning outcomes for schools from these communities.

5.2.2.3 THE INFLUENCE OF PERSON CULTURE

Individuals who operate under person culture are often self-directed and self-motivated; they also require little guidance (Handy, 1993) however it may become challenging for leaders to direct such personalities especially in crisis situations. Handy (1993) also warns that the separation between organisational logic and individual's feelings may cause "organisational

hijack”, a phenomenon in which a unit (in this case a person) within an over-tightly run organisation withholds its labour or talent. Mrs Adam’s team have consistently presented the role culture as a practice in ensuring goals are achieved whereby the various members knew their specific role in the school management as well as the school as a whole. They therefore acted accordingly with regard to implementing changes. This was evident pre-Covid-19 and during Covid-19. Leaders were able to influence teams to work toward common goals and achieve desired outcomes. As a leader, Mrs Adam experienced early on in her days as a principal, one member of her team working outside the existing culture which she shares:

I remember this one head of department who headed the one phase, and she was trying to run her own school within the school. She used the influence she was charged with to separate her team from the rest of our school (Chapter 4, p. 49).

Mr Govind experienced some difficulty with certain members of his staff preferring to function outside the perimeters of teams and placed greater emphasis on their personal preferences over the school. He explicates:

Like every team, not every member is a team player, so I did have certain members of staff who were not happy about the additional responsibilities they were required to take on. These members of staff were not happy that they had to now report to school earlier than usual, assist with screening and go out on additional times for ground duty (Chapter 4, p. 62).

He also had challenges with leaders who were stakeholders from the school community trying to use the power they possessed as leaders to work counter to the set culture of Freedom Primary. He explains this experience:

In every organisation we have challenges and once again we had a member of our school governing body challenging our readiness and finances. As a leader who works within the scope of policy and procedure, I was confident in the readiness of school to allow this member to take measurements to assess social distancing requirements were being met and view documentation questioning our teams’ efforts (Chapter 4, p. 63).

To Mr Govind's favour, he had more people preferring to place the organisation over their personal inclinations. This allowed the school to continue to function optimally during this period. In organisations where personal culture prevails, employees prescribe to placing their individual concerns about their own personal needs over the organisation (Handy, 1986). This sort of culture discourages loyalty to an organisation and members are detached from the goals of the organisation (Cacciattolo, 2014) as was clear in Mr Govind's account of how certain members of his staff were focused on their personal needs and not the school as an organisation. In times of crisis this type of culture can be to the detriment of an organisation like a school. Transformational leaders who are able to use individualised consideration to provide a supportive climate in this type of prevailing culture may be able to coach and advise such followers from desisting from such behaviour (Northouse, 2013) which Mrs Adam was able to do as was captured in her account above of how she experienced one member on her management team years ago who displayed person culture. Leaders like Mrs Adam use inspirational motivation in order to motivate members to want to achieve more than their own self-interest which resulted in her teams working toward common goals of the school.

It is likely that teachers who are leaders hold power over those in their care and may mirror their beliefs upon the children in their classes (Young, 1989). Research into classroom practices with regard to communication and teacher beliefs found teacher practices may include an indoctrinatory style (Young, 1989) however, data from leaders in this study did not present such findings at these schools. Mrs Adam however, did elaborate on educators being more personally vested during the early return of learners to school:

It was during the brainstorming sessions that the element of person before the organisation began to crop its head to some degree. Educators initially were not willing to embrace the changes that this new normal of Covid-19 required by prioritising their personal safety (Chapter 4, p. 52).

Through swift action Mrs Adam was able to address these concerns by allowing educators to have their concerns put forward so that this behaviour did not transfer to classes. Leaders who hold power of influence over such teachers need to identify this sort of practices in order to emancipate both learners and teachers from engaging in practices like person culture that may be harmful to the school environment. Transformational leaders who operate on

multidimensional levels of leadership must encourage individuals in such schools to emphasise collective values and needs rather than individual values and needs (Bass, 2005) as was the case with Rainbow Primary. Culture that is driven by personality or preference in large organisations like schools may become self-replicating and self-reinforcing (Handy, 1993). It is important for leaders to emphasise that the schools comes before and everything else should come later (Cacciattolo, 2014).

5.3 SUB-PUZZLE TWO: WHY DO SCHOOL PRINCIPALS LEAD AND MANAGE THE TRANSFORMATION OF SCHOOL CULTURE DURING COVID-19 PANDEMIC IN THE WAY THEY DO?

The compass that directed the emergence of themes for sub-puzzle two has continued to be Burns' (1978) transformational leadership theory and Handy's (1986) organisational culture theory. These themes include: power culture in times of crisis and focusing on the task at hand. Transformational leadership is encompassing of idealised influence, intellectual stimulation and individualised consideration (Bass, 1985). While Handy's (1986) theory brings to the fore power, task, and role culture among the three cultures; that enabled me to identify the themes in this sub-puzzle, as well as giving considerations to leaders serving as a motivational role model, encouraging followers to think out of the box (van Dierendonck et al., 2013).

5.3.1 POWER CULTURE IN TIMES OF CRISIS

In organisations where power lies with a few people and these people are the main decision makers, subordinates often have no choice but to follow instructions (Cacciattolo, 2014). Such organisations may have charismatic leaders who keep channels of communication open directly with subordinates therefore they anticipate swift results (Handy, 1993). In this sub-theme I have included looking at things differently and financial burdens to direct how power culture may be both beneficial and injurious to the education system.

5.3.1.1 LOOKING AT PRACTICES DIFFERENTLY

Successful leaders recognise the necessity of influencing others' behaviours in a systematic way to create change (Gurr & Drysdale, 2020). These leaders also provide possibilities to reinvent and recreate institutions by challenging long-held norms and routines (Zhao, 2020). Mr Govind and Mrs Adam had over the years developed an organisational culture that

promoted innovative thinking and collaboration. When the storm of Covid-19 arrived at their schools, the established culture allowed them to use innovative and collaborative planning and preparation in order to view the challenge from a different perspective. They began to work before the official opening of schools to ensure their schools were structurally ready to welcome both learners and educators. This included providing additional watering stations, repairing toilets and the essential signage and screening requirements set out in the SOPs. Mrs Adam elaborates on how they managed this:

My deputy principal has been a tower of strength during this time as he and I began to put plans in place to ensure there were sufficient watering stations, social distancing markings in and out of the classroom to ensure all protocols were factored in (Chapter 4, p. 51).

Mr Govind shares how his team prepared for the official opening of Freedom Primary:

My team was on the plant weeks before schools could open making structural adjustments by ensuring the new SOPs were in place. Yes, there was the element of fear among my team, but through my influence as principal Team Freedom Primary felt that they would be much safer at school once all procedures and protocols were met. We had been having team meetings to decide on our way forward before directive from the Department of Basic Education (Chapter 4, p. 62).

Fortunately for both these schools they had the existing finances that had been saved from various fundraising drives over the years. Repairs had to be quickly completed in order to meet the official school opening dates set out by the Department of Basic Education. Social distancing requirements inside classes and on the school premises had to be demarcated. Mr Govind explains how this was achieved:

We not only ensured that the school was demarcated according to social distancing requirements inside and outside classes, but we had made structural changes, provided PPE (including face shields) for each learner, and paid our additional educators and support staff during the days when school was closed (Chapter 4, p. 63).

The rotational process introduced at schools allowed for learners to attend school in groups. Both Mrs Adam and Mr Govind selected the fifty percent attendance model where half the

class per grade attended on alternate days. Mrs Adam elaborates on what Rainbow Primary did:

We opted for the rotational model and had fifty percent of the school report on alternate days. This meant that each class would be divided into two groups with each group reporting on an alternate day (Chapter 4, p. 51).

Mr Govind unpacks the model Freedom Primary selected:

This was when we selected the alternate day model whereby fifty percent of our learners will report to school on alternate days. This meant that a class that had forty learners for example, twenty learners became group one, and the other twenty learners became group two. They would then attend school on alternate days in their groups (Chapter 4, p. 62).

This meant that work previously taught in five days had to now be taught in ten days. This resulted in only fifty percent of the curriculum being covered. While additional work was given for learners to complete at home, this was limited to homes where parents played an active part in their child's learning and had the skill to assist their child. Leaders who encourage and nurture innovation, creativity and collaboration inspire educational possibilities (Driscoll, 2021). Both leaders were able to lean on their existing organisational culture to be able to achieve this. This is evident as the prevailing culture that was adaptive to change, assisted with the introduction of remote learning at these schools and made the transition to the rotational model of attendance easier to implement at these schools. However, there is a clear absence of learner-directed learning because most South African schools are categorised by teacher-directed learning (Naicker & Chikoko, 2021). The data generated shows it was only in the aesthetic subjects that learners managed to engage in some form of self-directed learning. Mr Govind elaborates:

We also noted that learners did engage in learning on their own in aesthetic subjects by completing projects while at home. Learners did experience learning challenges with work relating to critical thinking

subjects when they had to work on their own as parents were unable to guide their learning (Chapter 4, p. 67).

The data provides evidence that these leaders put mechanisms in place that brought learners into the classroom to cover fifty percent of the curriculum but not encourage learners to work on their own across the curriculum. As teachers are the individuals holding power over their learners, the curriculum is taught by constant evaluation and correction imposed by teachers who have imposed models of valid responses (Young, 1989) as the findings suggest this was achieved for fifty percent of the work at these schools. In the event of a culture that encouraged learner directed learning been more prevalent, a greater percentage of learning would have been covered and not just fifty percent. In this way, demand is placed by teachers for learners to become passive receivers of knowledge and not critique concepts (Young, 1989), keeping the power within educational institutions and further enforcing teacher-directed learning.

Township schools have constantly been classified as being saddled with overcrowded classes as a result learning difficulties are experienced (Zimmerman, 2014; Zulu et al., 2019). From the data generated, I found that although Covid-19 allowed for smaller classes in township schools, this was not fully capitalised on by these leaders. Reading literacy levels in South African schools among Grade Four and Five learners have been consistently low as per the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) (Zimmerman, 2014). This period that allowed for fewer learners in class could have been utilised to elevate standards of reading as teachers now had the opportunity to interact with learners within smaller classes. The data generated showed leaders focused on curriculum coverage and achieving specific learning outcomes in this way not addressing learning difficulties that prevailed. Mrs Adam details their plan:

Teaching of subjects like Mathematics, Languages and Sciences was prioritised as specified outcomes were set by the Department of Basic Education and some of these subjects were content based so specialised teaching was needed to bridge the gap of time lost in classes (Chapter 4, p. 51).

A possible reason for teachers and principals not exploiting this period could be that curriculum coverage prioritised by state over this period kept them bound. Traditional outlook of education emphasises pre-decided curriculum over student experiences and needs

(Young, 1989) placing curriculum as a source of state power over school entities and not learner needs driven.

5.3.1.2 FINANCIAL BURDENS

Before Covid-19, educational inequality and inequity were clearly prevalent, but they were even more so during this pandemic. It shed attention on the thorny issues surrounding education systems' marginalisation of the poorest and most vulnerable learners (Harris, 2020). Being placed as principals in schools in a township like Phoenix, finance will always play a significant role as money in the form of school fees is difficult to acquire from households in this community, but sustainable financial practices allow for stability at these schools. Mr Govind identified the importance of financial stability early on as principal, as this was the key area he targeted. He shares his view:

I targeted the key area I knew would make the most impact – school finances. My experience with leadership showed me the leverage financial success brought as more money meant more leverage in the community (Chapter 4, p. 59).

Leadership skill in such communities were displayed through how financially stable the school was as impressed upon by Mr Govind in his view. Mrs Adam and Mr Govind stabilised the financial conditions in order to meet essential needs of their schools through ensuring a steady income, whether it was through school fee collection or fundraising programmes. Mrs Adam reveals how finances were viewed:

This has helped us ensure that these guardians and parents become much more supportive of our goal of offering their children quality education. It also helped to ensure our school community understood the pivotal role school fees played in our goal of offering quality teaching and learning (Chapter 4, p. 50).

Mr Govind shares his insights on the school's financial needs:

In township school's money is very hard to come by, especially in a community like the one Freedom Primary served. My experience with leadership showed me the leverage financial success brought as more money meant more leverage in the community. I was going to show

the world that anything was possible with a good leader who is able to use the leverage he had effectively. I achieved this to some degree. The finances grew rapidly because I worked my team tirelessly pushing them to do more by drawing on the authority I commanded over them. I became a sort of dictator determining everything that happened at school (Chapter 4, p. 59).

It was also this financial stability that existed at these schools that allowed both Freedom Primary and Rainbow Primary to meet the initial challenge of Covid-19. These principals were able to dip into savings accumulated to make their schools safer for learners and teachers. Mrs Adam explains:

Thankfully years of savings through steady school fee collections and fundraising projects had placed us in a favourable position to finance these changes at school (Chapter 4, p. 51).

Mr Govind was even able to keep additional staff and provide PPE to learners and educators, because of the comfortable financial position he and his team had built over the years:

The additional savings we had built through ongoing fundraising initiatives gave us a healthy financial position where we were now able to make Freedom Primary safe for our educators and learners (Chapter 4, p. 63).

Both principals expressed deep concern for their schools' future should the situation of Covid-19 continue. Mrs Adam shares her fears:

We can only achieve this with support from the Department of Basic Education through ensuring we receive increased funding to sustain us as a school as a lack of finances keeps us from breaking the cycle of oppression in this township. We are unable to sustain our finances due to non-payment of school fees and other avenues we previously used to sustain our school as a result of the pandemic (Chapter 4, p. 56).

Mr Govind opens up about his financial fears going forward:

I fear this pandemic has placed undue pressure on schools to manage on their own. Should this pandemic continue any longer Freedom Primary will be sailing in unsteady waters as we are unable to provide financial support much longer to endure this storm. The financial inequalities that currently exist in township schools must not be used as a mechanism to keep schools oppressed. The Department of Basic Education, I am optimistic needs to provide guidelines on how they will assist schools to manage their financial burdens (Chapter 4, p. 66).

Schools within the township of Phoenix must initiate various funding programmes to subsidise the limited funding provided by the state in these areas. Covid-19 SOPs place several restrictions on social gatherings and the fear of physical contact limits activities that are usually part of fundraising initiatives at these schools. Unemployment in the community has greatly affected school fund returns as well.

The financial divide that schools in townships struggle with was further exasperated by the pandemic as indicated above by both Mrs Adam and Mr Govind. These schools face challenges of poverty, vandalism, and burglaries (Zulu et al., 2019). The history of inequality that exist at schools like Freedom Primary and Rainbow Primary similar to other township, schools have certainly deprived these schools of basic resources. Principals must use their influence to tap into other avenues to subsidise revenue. Mr Govind has expressed how he became a 'sort of dictator' demonstrating how some principals are forced to become tyrants using their power to ensure targets are met so that finances are available since it is finances that lead to class dominated institutions (Held, 1980). These principals try through stable financial positions to provide equitable access to education (Ayers et al., 2009) as Mrs Adam explained the importance of a steady school fee payment at her school. These principals are also limited due to the conditions prevalent in the communities they serve. As Mrs Adam shares how they visited homes to determine the financial situations at various homes:

Some of our children come from very impoverished homes where they are taken care of by their 'gogos' (grandmothers) so we try and connect with them. I remember when we had to assist such families with school fee exemption which we used this power that we had as a

draw card to have families from such homes apply. We made the effort to travel into their communities and meet with members from these households on the outskirts of the township of Phoenix to see how we could assist them (Chapter 4, p. 49).

While most schools globally and in South Africa prior to Covid-19 were equipping themselves for 4IR (McNulty & McNulty, 2018), schools in these townships were working toward keeping their heads above the water. Schools in this community are further divided by quintile systems. Schools may only be kilometres away from each other but due to their quintile ranking, they receive different financial support from the state. Mr Govind explains how this quintile ranking disadvantages Freedom Primary:

Our quintile ranking was set by the Department of Basic Education as quintile five and as a result we receive very little funding from the Department of Education, however we are aware of the difficulties our school community faces on a regular basis. Unemployment and poverty are rife in many homes in this community (Chapter 4, p. 65).

This difference also further divides schools within the township. Principals like Mr Govind have to tap into their power over those inferior to them to raise additional funding to keep schools functional; fortunately he was able to achieve this prior to Covid-19. The predominant economic system appears thus unequal and unfair (Gibson, 1986) and this could not be more evident than during the pandemic where schools like Rainbow Primary and Freedom Primary find their financial reserves now dwindling. The masses in these communities were left at the mercy of those willing to provide some assistance through the economic elite or faith-based organisations as expounded by Mr Govind:

I used my authority as school leader to network with local faith-based organisations to ensure learners received a healthy lunch on a daily basis. During school closures as a result of the national lockdown Freedom Primary once again tapped into those networks (Chapter 4, p. 65).

5.3.2 FOCUSING ON THE TASK AT HAND

Transformational leaders encourage others to concentrate on the organisation's mission, shared values, and the use of a team approach. The results in terms of academics at school are

more important to the leader than the process of getting there so members are given the opportunity to make decisions (Pepper, 2010). The organisational structure in crisis situations may sometimes direct task completion more easily but they also become fluid and allow for other members on a team to take responsibility for tasks (Rankin et al., 2013). In this final theme I draw on the importance of leaders focusing on achieving the tasks they set out through teams within the school and beyond. I outline this through the two sub-themes that emerged in the analytical framework (see section 3.6.2.1, p. 41): keeping learning at the centre and community as partners.

5.3.2.1 KEEPING LEARNING AT THE CENTRE

A small section of schools have been successful in keeping learning alive through mechanisms like blended learning and other innovative strategies (Mahaye, 2020). School leaders together with their teams had to think outside the box to keep the flame alive for many learners unable to access digital learning during the prolonged lockdown (Akinwumi & Itobore, 2020). During the lockdown in March of 2020, several school principals began to weigh options on how to keep learners engaged with learning, Mrs Adam and Mr Govind were no different. Due to the socio-economic conditions prevalent in both these school communities, leaders had to become innovative in how they continued to provide learners with learning material. This led to introduction of resource packs for learners to work with at home. Through the knowledge and skill of some teachers and their access to technology some material was shared through digital platforms. Unfortunately, majority parents were unable to access this material, Mrs Adam expands:

So, when we needed to interact with our parent community during the lockdown it was this new way of doing things through technology that we turned to. We started to communicate with parents through social media in order to support our learners in their learning. But alas due to the fact that Rainbow Primary is situated within a township that is a mix of socio-economic households, many parents could not be reached, and this was yet another bridge we had to cross (Chapter 4, p. 54).

She further elaborates on how her school overcame some of the challenges Rainbow Primary faced:

We persevered and provided hard copies of resource packs that learners could collect, or we even did home visits to drop off packs. This helped keep learning alive for many of our children and ensured that children had equal access to learning material (Chapter 4, p. 54).

Mr Govind relays the challenges Freedom Primary experienced:

Bearing in mind this school is based in a township with varying socio-economic conditions as a result of their historical disadvantage, we had to cater for learners who were unable to access the school on these online platforms to ensure they were not further disadvantaged going forward. Freedom Primary firmly believes in not disadvantaging any group, so we had to cater for hard copies of work to be collected from school for those learners unable to access social media (Chapter 4, p. 64).

The key source of remote learning remained the resource packages compiled by teachers. When learners were able to return to schools on a rotational basis, Mr Govind and his team decided to not issue resource packages to improve learner attendance which was dwindling:

We found that because learners were receiving work to complete at home, attendance to school dropped. We decided to suspend resource packs and, in this way, motivate children to come regularly to school. I am proud to say that this process bore much fruit as we were able to bring most (if not all learners per grade) back to the class so that they too could become accustomed to the new culture of doing things at school (Chapter 4, p. 64).

Parents began to brave their fears and send learners regularly to school. Mrs Adam has been one of the few principals in the township to ensure all grade seven learners attended daily. This was to ensure minimum learning losses were experienced by learners exiting the primary school phase. She details this below:

We have made amendments to how we deliver lessons for example while majority of schools in the area do not have their grade sevens

in school daily, we have ensured they are here every day. We have also managed to catch-up on all learning losses they experienced as a result of rotational classes in 2020 and are now where they should be in terms of curriculum coverage in grade seven. (Chapter 4, p. 56)

Leaders' leadership expertise comes through during crisis periods (Dirani et al., 2020) and this was very evident in the methods employed by Mrs Adam and Mr Govind. The demeanour in which these leaders managed their schools avoiding chaos and ensuring well-structured resoluteness (Bowers et al., 2017) displayed their skill in managing this crisis period. They were able to identify the mechanisms that needed to be put in place to prioritise teaching and learning. We see this in the way Mr Govind addresses issues of learner attendance and how Mrs Adam manages the senior learners' daily attendance at her school. The organisational culture that was rampant at these schools helped to bind the members of the school (Tsang, 2009) which became a pathway for transforming school culture at this crisis time (Zhao,2020). These principals were able to formulate new plans focusing on a positive school culture focused away from the challenges they were facing (Zulu et al., 2004). They were able to utilise the title of force they possessed to motivate staff to go the extra mile (Cacciattolo, 2014) in ensuring learners received the additional support through provision of suitable resource material. In a situation like this it is organisations where power lies in the hands of few people that ensures decisions can be quickly made (Handy, 1986). These two principals were able to quickly delegate duties to their teams ensuring results are swiftly produced. The state was also able to draw on the power they possessed over these principals ensuring learning losses were minimised. The emphasis on curriculum completion by the state was the driving force of ensuring its function of building individuals who replicate their nationalistic curriculum (Young, 1989) at the expense of teacher and learner well-being.

5.3.2.2 COMMUNITY AS PARTNERS

For school leaders, communities are a valuable resource because they offer a plethora of supplementary skills and knowledge (Harris & Jones, 2020). In South Africa where only fifty-four percent of the population have access to clean water, Covid-19 compounded the problem with businesses collapsing resulting in job losses and increased unemployment (Amnesty International, 2021a); focus has shifted to mostly meeting basic needs as a priority

for communities. Schools in this township are always an extension of the communities they served. Leaders of township schools like Freedom Primary and Rainbow Primary had to not only focus on educational nourishment but meet food shortages that families in this community struggled with. Rainbow Primary only became beneficiaries of the NSNP initiative at the end of 2020, as Mrs Adam reveals:

Schools are also a pathway to provide meals to communities and Rainbow Primary was fortunate enough to be included in the Department of Basic Education's National School Nutrition Programme (NSNP) toward the latter part of 2020. We were able to make food hampers and distribute to families within the school community. Prior to this I used my influence in the community to enlist the help of religious and business organisations to provide meals to learners (Chapter 4, p. 53).

They had to source food hampers from other community and religious bodies. When the NSNP programme initially arrived at Rainbow Primary, deserving recipients were difficult to reach but when all learners physically returned to school the benefit of the programme was easily seen. Mr Govind who is principal of a quintile five school does not benefit from the NSNP as he explains:

Our school is not a beneficiary of the NSNP due to our quintile ranking. Our quintile ranking was set by the Department of Basic Education as quintile five and as a result we receive very little funding from the Department of Basic Education, however we are aware of the difficulties our school community faces on a regular basis (Chapter 4, p. 65).

Through the years, including the difficult period of the lockdown, Mr Govind sought out partners in local non-profit organisations and religious bodies so that learners and their families could receive meals. He discloses his school's initiatives in this regard:

I used my authority as school leader to network with local faith-based organisations to ensure learners received a healthy lunch on a daily basis. During school closures as a result of the national lockdown Freedom Primary once again tapped into those networks. We were able to assist our school community with food hampers that were

distributed from school in order to attempt to break the chain of poverty engulfing this community (Chapter 4, p. 65).

Closure of schools during the lockdown in 2020 didn't just perpetuate learning losses but many children lost access to daily meals received at schools as was evident from the findings at Rainbow Primary and Freedom Primary. School closures, transitions to remote learning, and suspensions of out-of-school programmes cut off children's access to the food sources they once relied on during the school week (Poole et al., 2021) albeit through community initiatives like those at Freedom Primary. Like online learning, schools globally were able to swiftly meet the need of the population dependent on school nutrition programmes by developing systems that identified key distribution points or provision of food vouchers (Poole, 2021). South African schools received meals through the NSNP initiative provided by the state, but the national lockdown closed these doors for a period (Molelekwa, 2020) at many schools that were beneficiaries. The state's provision of three hundred mobile kitchens acquired through a fifty million rand saving from the NSNP, helped ease this burden (Duma, 2020) and the state included more schools including Rainbow Primary as a recipient during November 2020. This was provided through state empowered systems of needs identification. Schools who were deemed self-sufficient were rated as quintile five and excluded from the programme to provide meals which left schools like Freedom Primary out in the cold. As human beings we organise our experiences according to what we prioritise and manufacture what we need for our existence by manipulating and controlling objects (Held, 1980) which is how the state manipulated the process when they identified beneficiaries of the NSNP excluding schools like Freedom Primary. Rainbow Primary and Freedom Primary are schools within the same township servicing school communities in the similar economic conditions were separated according to who the state prioritised as needy. The state utilised its power to further disadvantage certain groups according to mechanisms the state developed. This practice has not only disadvantaged schools similar to Freedom Primary within one township, through lack of financial support from the state but also food supplied to these institutions.

5.4 CONCLUSION

This chapter concentrated on the analysis and clarification of my narratives in response to the research puzzle presented in this study. At the commencement of the chapter I provided an analysis of sub-puzzle one on how do school principals lead and manage the process of

transforming school culture during the Covid-19 pandemic. I then presented my analysis of sub-puzzle two on why school principals lead and manage the transformation of school culture during the Covid-19 pandemic in the way they do. To adequately analyse the data generated, I referred to the two theories presented in this study, Burns' transformational leadership theory and Handy's organisational culture theory. I used the inductive and deductive approaches of data analysis and developed themes and referred to existing thematic frameworks presented in Chapter Three of this study. Chapter Six gives a summary of all chapters as well as provides my conclusions, reflections, and recommendations

CHAPTER SIX

FINDING THE SILVER LINING: SUMMARY OF THE STUDY, CONCLUSIONS, REFLECTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 INTRODUCTION

In the previous chapter I focused on the analysis of the narratives of my two participants to respond to the research puzzle presented in this study. In this chapter I present the summary of this study, the conclusions I have drawn, my reflections of conducting the study and ultimately my recommendations for those in leadership specifically school leaders faced with crisis periods. I have titled this chapter: “Finding the silver lining” because even though the two principals in this study faced a challenging task of transforming school culture during the pandemic, they found the ‘silver lining’ as they were able to transform how things were done at their institutions through a crisis period while learning new methods of doing things. Just like how runners take on the challenge of a race and experience feelings of exhilaration, exhaustion and accomplishment at the end of a marathon, these two principals too experienced feelings of relief and accomplishment. This study has allowed me to interrogate the difficult path two school leaders were faced with during the pandemic. These two principals were able to rise above the challenges of the pandemic and transform their school culture. As a researcher, I see how far they have come and although Covid-19 presented such a mammoth challenge to education, these two leaders have demonstrated through their leadership that there is definitely a silver lining visible on the path ahead. This allows me to also see how far I have grown in this process so I can present a prudent summary, table key conclusions and offer pertinent recommendations.

6.2 SUMMARY OF THE STUDY

The summary of the study provides an overall synopsis of each chapter from Chapter One to Five:

Chapter One – In this chapter I unpacked the integral role school leaders play in a crisis situation through their leadership style and the significant role that school culture plays during this period. I also set out the purpose of this study by highlighting the focus and

rationale. I presented the research puzzle that directed this study. The main puzzle being: What are the lived experiences of primary school principals leading township schools in transforming school culture during the Covid-19 pandemic? The sub-puzzle outlined: How do school principals lead and manage the process of transforming school culture during the Covid-19 pandemic? Why do school principals lead and manage the transformation of school culture during the Covid-19 pandemic in the way they do? I then proceeded to provide clarity on key concepts used in the study: Leadership, Management, The Relationship between Leadership and Management, School Culture and Township Schools. The lived experiences of primary school leaders in township schools during this period was a field that seemed untouched and so provided me the opportunity to address this gap in research. It also provided the conditions to explore what were the challenges these leaders faced and how they were able to overcome them.

Chapter Two – In conducting this study I feared that tackling an issue like Covid-19 will limit the amount of literature available as Covid-19 was a fairly new phenomenon the world and specifically education was tackling. As I began to delve into available sources, my fears diminished since there were sufficient studies that were available from global and national sources. This chapter was divided into the themes that I identified as pertinent to this study and the theories relevant to understanding this study. The themes identified provided a lens for how educational leaders, principals, school leaders, and school communities viewed the pandemic. They included: The Covid-19 Pandemic and Schools, School Principals as leaders in the 21st century, School Leadership in Times of Crisis, School leadership and the Covid-19 Pandemic, School Principals and Covid-19, School Leadership and Social Justice in Times of Crisis, School Leadership and School Culture. These themes enabled me to present the wide-ranging challenges and successes that education leaders and principals were faced with. My theoretical framework brought together two theories: Transformational Leadership and Handy's four types of organisational culture which provided the theoretical lens for this study. Burns' transformational leadership theory brought to the fore the leadership principles necessary during a challenging period while Handy's theory focused on the cultural practices underpinning organisations and how this affects school leadership during crisis times.

Chapter Three – Here I presented my research design and methodology. This study was conducted as a qualitative study within the critical paradigm utilising narrative inquiry. Storytelling has been one of my favourite activities and therefore selecting narrative inquiry was a natural choice for me. This methodology allowed me to delve deep into the lived experiences of my participants without intruding. I used convenience sampling to select suitable schools and then selected my participants purposively. Fortunately, I did not limit myself to two participants when identifying participants so it was easy to select from my pool of participants when one participant dropped off from the study. At the outset of this study, I was very curious about the lived experiences of my participants so I could give the principals a voice through this study. Narrative interviews allowed for the participants to tell their own stories while collage inquiry gave these stories visual representations. Covid-19 protocols allowed me as a novice researcher the opportunity to use varying methods when generating my data. I switched between online sessions and in person interviews (guarded by social distancing protocols) to maintain safety during this period.

I utilised two levels to analyse data. Initially I engaged in narrative analysis which encompassed the detailed composition of stories from the data. I then engaged in analysis of narrative where I deconstructed these stories in order to answer the research puzzle. I used storyboarding to guide me through this deconstruction process.

Chapter Four – This chapter of the study presented the narratives of my participants. Narrative interviews and collage inquiry helped generate my narratives. The challenges and successes that my participants faced allowed for me to view this pandemic through their eyes. I have to concede that these leaders and how they led their schools during this period will be etched in my memory forever. I say this because having seen them prior to the study as ‘just principals’, the opportunity the study provided allowed me to see them as more than principals and the experiences they shared provided stepping stones for me to grow as a researcher and someday a leader.

Chapter Five – In this chapter I focused on the analysis of narratives of the participants. I used the research puzzle as the lens through which their responses were analysed. My findings of this study in sub-puzzle one included: School principals had to change leadership styles by reviewing how old methods worked versus new methods; they also had to take

cognisance of the role technology played at their schools. The two leaders in the study used the leadership principles of motivation and collaboration in order to influence their teams, implement policy and curriculum changes by leaning on prevailing positive school cultural practices to lead and manage their schools.

Sub-puzzle two findings displayed that despite the challenges that these principals faced, they were able to use the power culture in times of crisis by looking at things differently while faced with financial burdens. Through this study it was also found that these leaders focused on the task at hand by keeping learning at the centre and ensuring they kept their communities as partners during this period in order to transform school culture.

6.3 CONCLUSIONS

This study was focused on the lived experiences of primary school principals transforming school culture during Covid-19. The following are the conclusions that I drew from my sub-puzzles:

6.3.1 SUB-PUZZLE ONE: HOW DO SCHOOL PRINCIPALS LEAD AND MANAGE THE PROCESS OF TRANSFORMING SCHOOL CULTURE DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC?

6.3.1.1 TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP AT THE CENTRE OF SCHOOL CULTURAL CHANGE

School principals draw on the influence they hold over their subordinates to ensure quality teaching and learning happens during a pandemic. These principals used their role as leaders in the school to motivate their teams to adapt to the changes that were brought upon by the pandemic. The school culture had to transform rapidly to adapt to the new normal at schools and these principals were able to ensure a smooth transition as a result of the positive influence they held over their teams. In this way they were able to influence their teams to do more than was expected. The conclusion here is that transformational leadership principles of collaboration, motivation and positive influence during crisis periods assist principals to transform school culture to adapt to change. School leaders who demonstrate that they are key assets during uncertain periods are able to transform school culture through influencing subordinates to work toward a common purpose (Singh & Lokotsch, 2005).

6.3.1.2 MANAGING CHANGE DURING CRISIS PERIODS

From this study I found that school principals play a significant role in drawing out the capacity of their teams to think out of the box through their management skills. Leaders were able to collaborate with their teams, organise and plan a way forward achieving higher levels of thinking by motivating members to use their creativity and roles with the teams to influence innovation. I conclude that principals' management skills encourage teams to engage, brainstorm and devise new ways to solve problems they face. Like leadership, effective management influences followers to collaborate and attempt new challenges (Bush, 2008). Effective management is able to plan, direct and organise processes (Bush, 2008) that ensure smooth transformation of school culture during crisis periods.

6.3.1.3 LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

School principals had to draw on their leadership ability to inspire their teams to be willing to be adaptive during this crisis period. Although individuals in the school expressed apprehension about working under fearful conditions, both participants displayed the ability to inspire and motivate their subordinates. They then drew plans to organise and direct activities that brought out the team spirit necessary to overcome the challenges they faced and achieved success in this way. The conclusion I draw here is that leadership and management skills of principals' work hand-in-hand when transforming school culture. Leadership leads teams to be inspired to achieve common goals while management ensures activities are effectively coordinated to achieve the desired goals (Bush, 2008; Northouse, 2013).

6.3.2 SUB-PUZZLE TWO: WHY DO SCHOOL PRINCIPALS LEAD AND MANAGE THE TRANSFORMATION OF SCHOOL CULTURE DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC IN THE WAY THEY DO?

6.3.2.1 POWER IN CRISIS TIMES

In order for decisions to be taken quickly and changes to be implemented swiftly I found that leaders in this study used the authority they held over their subordinates in order to implement changes. They were able to react quickly to changes and utilised their power to make rapid decisions during the pandemic. I conclude that power culture during crisis periods

is an advantage. In organisations like schools when decisions need to be taken quickly during a crisis, charismatic leaders who hold power over their teams are able to keep channels of communication open to ensure swift results (Handy, 1993). Leaders with positive power culture may be able to swiftly recreate and reinvent practices through a strong established culture of how things are done (Bowers et al., 2017).

6.3.2.2 SCHOOL CULTURE DURING CRISIS TIMES

In this study I found that principals had to lean on existing positive culture in order to effect changes to transform culture. The existing positive culture conveyed to teams how things were done and principals used this to influence changes to school culture. The conclusion drawn here is that school culture plays a significant role in crisis situations. School culture must also be open to change (Bowers et al., 2017). In order to transform school culture during a crisis, principals must be able to use prevailing school culture to influence teams to transform practices at schools.

6.3.2.3 PERSONAL LIVES

I have found that both my participants thrive due to their desire to be a better version of themselves due to the responsible roles they fulfil in their families. They draw strength from the challenges they face and use these challenges as stepping stones for success. I conclude that family responsibilities contribute to intrinsic motivation (Menges et al., 2016). Leaders who display responsible behaviour and feel accountable to their families, strive for excellence and display a desire to be strong motivators through their leadership actions.

6.3.2.4 PROFESSIONAL LIVES

These principals represent skills that inspire their teams. They have flawless work ethic and leadership drive which inspires subordinates to emulate their behaviour. I conclude strong work ethic and leadership drive leads to responsible, accountable and passionate leaders and managers. Leaders who exhibit strong work ethic focused on accountability with open channels of communication (Vimba et al., 2017) with their subordinates and their superiors, ensure a well-managed effective organisation.

6.3.2.5 INFLUENCE LEADS TO TRANSFORMATION

Through this study I found the important role influence plays in changing situations. At the start of the study both participants outlined how they influenced their subordinates to action changes that were needed to transform school culture. Later in the study one of the participants outlined how his team influenced his leadership style to change. I conclude that influence of leaders and subordinates enable change and may lead to emancipation (Held, 1980). Leaders influence subordinates to change and, in this way, free them from their own limitations and subordinates also influence leaders to be open to change and free them from leadership skills that may be disadvantageous to the organisation (Cacciattolo, 2014). By relating their lived experiences in this study, the participants were able to visualise and share the role influence played at their institutions and in this way liberate them from wanting to return to old practices.

6.4 IMPACTING AND TRANSFORMING REAL LIVES

Through this study the participants Mrs Adam and Mr Govind were able to evaluate the key principles of leadership they drew from. Developing core values, communicating with staff, collective decision-making, drawing on the human side, encouraging innovation are some of the key principles leaders in a crisis develop (Kaul et al., 2020). Both participants indicated that this study allowed them to assess how each of their key practices and principles strengthened their organisation while identifying areas that require urgent review. They concur that successful leaders are able to identify the areas that require development, and allocate time and resources accordingly (Kaul et al., 2020).

Leaders in this study drew on the fact that this study allowed them to reflect on the need for schools to become resilient and not hold on to conventional methods (Naicker & Chikoko, 2021). This study transformed their ideas around what sort of traditional practices necessitated change at their institutions. Mrs Adam and Mr Govind were appreciative that this study allowed them to view the pandemic as an opportunity to reimagine and rethink their own leadership (Harris & Jones, 2020) in this way seeing the pandemic as a gateway to new ways of leading their teams.

6.5. MY REFLECTIONS ON CONDUCTING THIS STUDY

At the outset of this study, I chose to use a metaphor to create a sense of what the experiences of the two principals were in comparison to something tangible readers as well as school leaders could relate to. This choice of metaphor further allowed me to stimulate the reader's thoughts that a simple exposition would not be able to achieve (Labaree, 2019). The metaphor of a marathon that I selected did not just apply to the process of this study but my own journey as a researcher that I undertook. There were great moments of excitement as I prepared for this journey where I saw the world through a different lens. There was an enormous amount of nervousness as I worked through the paces of sifting for information to relate to my journey. I was nervous that the metaphor I selected would be contextually amenable (Labaree, 2019). This process of sifting through information relating to an assenting metaphor opened my eyes to the world of writing. It enabled me to see how writing experiences can convey clear images and activate the readers' imagination to be able to share in the emotions expressed through the study.

Research required me to select a suitable research design and methodology to set forth my study (Cohen et al., 2018). When I began to sift through the piles of information available on the methodology and design I had initially so easily selected, it really got real at this point as I began to feel overwhelmed. As I reflect on this stage of my study, I can now safely say this was one of the absolute highlights in my study. Reading through pages and pages of information on my methodology and the paradigm within which I was working I began to grow. Narrative inquiry provided me a view into the lives of my participants in order to see varying layers of people (Andrews et al., 2013) within challenging situations. I could feel my view on the world around me open up as I began to delve into the critical paradigm. I began to see how critical theorists attempted to elucidate the reasons that hinder organisations and individuals from gaining control of or even influencing decisions that have a significant impact on their lives (Gibson, 1986) and later during the narratives I saw this in the narratives of my participants. I remember engaging in debates over this with family and colleagues which brought about great amounts of excitement. My methods of inquiry that is, narrative interviews and collage inquiry inspired me as I dug deeper into these methods. Narrative interviews provided the opportunity to walk alongside leaders as they spontaneously shared their experiences (Asghar, 2013). I know that these methods that I selected worked very well for my participants as I could see the sparkle in their eyes when they got the opportunity to tell their story. They presented their collage with so much pride as it allowed them to display

increased degrees of expression because they had conscious control over what is being conveyed (Williams, 2000).

Working through the middle miles when I had to generate the data was a very exciting time in my study. The interaction with my participants placed me in a path that allowed me to walk sometimes very closely with them and gain in-depth information about their challenges and successes (Cohen et al., 2018). The challenge of conducting this study during Covid-19 limited the interaction I envisaged, however it allowed me to dig deep and draw out not just the reactions of my participants but also became my own learning curve as a novice researcher. Covid-19 changed the way we do almost all things with restrictions as a result of lockdowns and other limitations placed for our safety. There has been focus on minimising exclusions during this period so as not to marginalise groups and fortify inequalities (Mitchell, 2021). I was fortunate that both my participants and I had access to technology so the idea of reinforcing inequality was swiftly dealt with. We could maintain communication through various channels during the data generation period. The other challenge that I faced was during the analysis of these narratives. I wanted to tell their stories through my own perspective as I now saw the world through a lens that encouraged emancipation from power structures (Held, 1980) that plagued my participants, but as a researcher I had to work within data and themes that emerged from their narratives (Polkinghorne, 1995) and not my own. This is another reason I saw myself “clawing” through this point of my journey. I had to ensure that I worked within my responsibilities of analysing, organising, describing and reporting on themes I found within the data generated (Nowell et al., 2017).

As I reach the end stages of my own marathon and I could now see the silver lining begin to emerge, I felt a range of emotions. As I reflect through the paces I undertook in my marathon, I remember the feeling of exhilaration around the journey I was about to embark on, a few paces ahead as I reached my middle miles mixed feelings of nervousness, growing into a new me and varying levels of excitement propelled me to continue. Now as I stand in front of my silver lining, I feel encompassed by various emotions ranging from fear, apprehension and enthusiasm to see what this silver lining means. A dream is now in the palm of my hands as I hold it out to share with whoever wants a part of it.

6.6 RECOMMENDATIONS

This study has allowed me to share the lived experiences of principals in primary schools in township schools and these are my recommendations after this study:

RECOMMENDATION ONE

School principals in this study offered teachers the opportunity to lead change programmes in order to bring about collective change. It is recommended that this form of transformative agency be sustained by principals by allowing teachers to take collective responsibility for changes. Capitalising on providing teams with positive feedback to produce change in this way encourages morphogenesis at schools. While systems are centralised, at schools principals should take advantage of their teams' willingness to change and evolve.

RECOMMENDATION TWO

School culture shapes how people in an organisation think and act. Culture is the invisible stream of norms, values, beliefs, customs, and rituals that has developed over time as people collaborate, solve issues, and face difficulties. Principals in this study were successful in transforming school culture during the pandemic since the existing school culture was open to change. It is recommended that principals and school leaders in the process of transforming school culture ensure that the culture they aim to build is open to changes especially under varying conditions. This will allow the new culture they are attempting to build to ensure the organisation is able to not only sustain itself but flourish during a crisis.

RECOMMENDATION THREE

Leaders who practice transformational leadership principles are able to influence, motivate and inspire teams during crisis periods. It is the recommendation of this study that principals adopt school culture that encourages these leadership principles. Teams that are motivated inspire to improve and contribute to positive school cultural practices. These teams will aspire to influence one another so that they may transform the school culture to bring about positive changes.

RECOMMENDATION FOUR

A significant number of changes were brought about as a result of access to technology. Transforming school culture geared towards technological professional development encouraging 4IR skills, are required for school principals as well as educators. The power that this knowledge holds over education leaders must not be a mechanism to keep school leaders out of the transforming stage that schools are currently in.

RECOMMENDATION FIVE

With the advent of remote learning at schools, school principals need to transform the traditional learning and teaching culture at schools. Through transforming the current school culture that encourages traditional teacher-directed learning so that learning is not limited to the confines of classrooms, a school culture that motivates learners to direct their own learning will emancipate learners from the limitations currently placed on their learning. This may also require additional research to capacitate principals in low socio-economic schools with limited access to technology.

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APPENDIX A: DATA GENERATION TOOLS

Data will be generated from the field, using two methods - narrative interviews and collage inquiry. There will be 3 sessions over a period of three days. These will be conducted as follows:

DAY ONE

SESSION ONE: Narrative Interview Part One (Early lived-experiences)

Participants will be given the opportunity to share their life experiences and discuss details of the following:

- Early life (childhood experiences - personal and school)
- Educational training (experiences while at university/college)
- Early teaching and leadership experiences
- Early experiences with culture of teaching and learning
- Reflect on experiences that led to transformations

DAY TWO

SESSION TWO: Narrative Interview Part Two (Leading and managing during the crisis)

Participants will share their stories by discussing the following areas:

- Experiences with school culture while leading their school (pre-Covid-19)
- Changes in school culture during the Covid-19 period
- Main challenges experienced as principal during this period
- Reflections on how they managed the process amid the pandemic
- Identify steps taken to introduce transformative actions during the pandemic

DAY THREE

SESSION THREE: Participants will be requested to develop a collage, relating to their experiences as principals transforming their school culture during the Covid-19 pandemic

- Participants will be provided with resources to complete this activity. Resources include, scissors, magazines, charts and glue stick.
- Pictures, newspaper clippings and other material relating to Covid-19 will be presented to the participants.
- They will select words, phrases, pictures or even full articles to develop their collage.
- They will be requested to explain why they chose the items they did and possibly why they left out others.
- Participants will stick the pictures, words and/or articles in the order they believe best represents their narrative.
- Participants will be required to relate stories triggered as they compile the collage.

APPENDIX B: GATEKEEPER'S LETTER – DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION



KWAZULU-NATAL PROVINCE
EDUCATION
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

OFFICE OF THE HEAD OF DEPARTMENT

Private Bag X9137, PIETERMARITZBURG, 3200
Anton Lembede Building, 247 Burger Street, Pietermaritzburg, 3201
Tel: 033 392 1063

Email: Phindile.duma@kzndoe.gov.za

Enquiries: Phindile Duma

Ref.:214/8/1727

Mrs S Syed
26 Tynecroft Place
Longcroft
PHOENIX
4068

Dear Mrs Syed

PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN THE KZN DoE INSTITUTIONS

Your application to conduct research entitled: "TRANSFORMING SCHOOL CULTURE IN THE ERA OF COVID-19: NARRATIVES OF PRIMARY SCHOOL PRINCIPALS LEADING TOWNSHIP SCHOOLS", 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 26 April 2021 to 31 August 2023.
7. Your research and interviews will be limited to the schools you have proposed and approved by the Head of Department. Please note that Principals, Educators, Departmental Officials and Learners are under no obligation to participate or assist you in your investigation.
8. Should you wish to extend the period of your survey at the school(s), please contact Miss Phindile Duma at the contact numbers above.
9. Upon completion of the research, a brief summary of the findings, recommendations or a full report/dissertation/thesis must be submitted to the research office of the Department. Please address it to The Office of the HOD, Private Bag X9137, Pietermaritzburg, 3200.
10. Please note that your research and interviews will be limited to schools and institutions in KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education.

PINETOWN DISTRICT


Dr. E.V. Nzama
Head of Department: Education
Date: 28 April 2021

GROWING KWAZULU-NATAL TOGETHER

APPENDIX C: GATEKEEPER'S LETTER (SCHOOL)

REQUEST FOR PERMISSION FROM SCHOOL TO CONDUCT RESEARCH

26 Tynecroft Place

Longcroft

Phoenix

4068

21 January 2021

Principal

Dear Madam/Sir

Request for permission to conduct research at your school

I wish to request your permission to conduct research at your school. I would like to interview the school principal.

As part of the requirements to complete my Degree of Master of Education in Educational Leadership, Management and Policy at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, I am required to conduct research. The study focuses on how the principal was able to transform how things were done during the Covid-19 pandemic. I would like to use your school as one of the research sites and this letter intends to request your permission. Should permission be granted, the interviews with the participant, that is the school principal, will be scheduled as per the his/her convenience. Please note that participation in this study is voluntary and the participant has the right to withdraw from the study at any time without any negative consequences. In addition, you are assured that the details of the school and the participant will be kept confidential and your identity will not be disclosed to anyone.

For more information and questions about the study, you may contact the researcher or the research supervisor on:

Researcher: Shahista Syed

████████████████████

Email address: shamithasyed05@gmail.com

Research Supervisor: Professor I. Naicker

Tel No.: (031) 2603461

Email address: naicker1@ukzn.ac.za

You may also contact the Research Office on:

Tel No.: 27 31 2604557

Email: HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za

Thanking you in advance

Yours in Education

Mrs S. Syed

APPENDIX D: PARTICIPANT INFORMED CONSENT

Information Sheet and Consent to Participate in Research

20 January 2021

To the Principal

My name is Shahista Syed and I am conducting a research project as a requirement at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, towards a Degree of Masters in Education. My contact number is [REDACTED] email address is [REDACTED] shamithasyed05@gmail.com.

You are being invited to consider participating in a study that involves researching your lived-experiences as a principal who was transforming school culture during the Covid-19 pandemic. The aim of this research is to explore how you as principal in a township school in Phoenix was

able to lead and manage your school while transforming how things were done during this crisis period. The purpose of this study is to assist other principals who will be faced with crisis situations while changing how things are done during turbulent times. It will also add to the body of knowledge available to members in the education leadership, management and policy sector. The study is expected to enrol two primary school principals from within the Phoenix Township. It will involve the following procedures: You will be interviewed for a period of approximately two hours over three days whereby you will be requested to narrate your experiences over the years as leader under different circumstances (session one). At the next two sessions you will be requested to narrate how you led and managed your school while changing how things are done during Covid-19. At a final session you will be requested to compile a collage (all material will be provided) in order to share your experiences. The duration of your participation if you choose to enrol and remain in the study is expected to be four sessions (three sessions for the narrative interview and one session for the collage). The study is funded by the researcher.

The study may involve the following risks and/or discomforts: recollection of memories of possible personal and or professional loss. We hope that the study will create the following benefits: inform and provide assistance to other principals and leaders in schools on how to manage and lead change during turbulent times.

This study has been ethically reviewed and approved by the UKZN Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (approval number HSSREC/00002619/2021).

In the event of any problems or concerns/questions you may contact the researcher at shamithasyed05@gmail.com, [REDACTED] or the UKZN Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee, contact details as follows:

HUMANITIES & SOCIAL SCIENCES RESEARCH ETHICS ADMINISTRATION

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Tel: 27 31 2604557- Fax: 27 31 2604609

Email: HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za

Participation in this research is voluntary and the participant may withdraw from the study at any point, and that in the event of refusal/withdrawal of participation the participant will not incur penalty or loss of treatment or other benefit to which they are normally entitled. There are no potential consequences to the participant's withdrawal from the study. The procedure required from the participants for an orderly withdrawal is to provide written confirmation of withdrawal. The researcher may terminate the participant from the study should the participant be no longer willing to participate and this information is provided to the researcher in writing.

There are no costs that will be incurred by the participant as a result of participation in the study.

Since this study is based on narrative research and the participant will provide lived-experiences that may be of a personal nature, pseudonyms will be used for the school and the participant. All information provided by the participant will be kept confidential. Data sets will be stored in a locked cupboard in the supervisor's office. Digital data will be password protected. The password will only be known by my supervisor and myself. After 5 years transcripts and other such data will be shredded and digital data will be deleted.

CONSENT FROM PARTICIPANT

I _____ have been informed about the study titled ‘Transforming school culture in the era of Covid-19: Narratives of primary school principals leading township schools’ by Shahista Syed.

I understand the purpose and procedures of the study.

I have been given an opportunity to answer questions about the study and have had answers to my satisfaction.

I declare that my participation in this study is entirely voluntary and that I may withdraw at any time without affecting any of the benefits that I usually am entitled to.

If I have any further questions/concerns or queries related to the study I understand that I may contact the researcher at shamithasyed05@gmail.com, _____

If I have any questions or concerns about my rights as a study participant, or if I am concerned about an aspect of the study or the researchers then I may contact:

HUMANITIES & SOCIAL SCIENCES RESEARCH ETHICS ADMINISTRATION

Research Office, Westville Campus

Govan Mbeki Building
Private Bag X 54001
Durban
4000

KwaZulu-Natal, SOUTH AFRICA

Tel: 27 31 2604557 - Fax: 27 31 2604609

Email: HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za

I hereby provide consent to:

Audio-record my interview YES / NO

Video-record my interview YES / NO


Signature of Participant

Date



APPENDIX E: TURNITIN REPORT

11/1/21, 7:47 PM Turnitin Originality Report

 **Turnitin Originality Report**

Ms by Shaista Syed
From MEd (MEd 2021)

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APPENDIX F: LANGUAGE CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE

25 Maple Crescent
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KLOOF
3610

Phone 031 – 7075912
0823757722
Fax 031 - 7110458
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sathsgovender4@gmail.com

Dr Saths Govender

19 NOVEMBER 2021

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

LANGUAGE CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE

This serves to inform that I have read the final version of the dissertation titled:

TRANSFORMING SCHOOL CULTURE IN THE ERA OF COVID-19: NARRATIVES OF PRIMARY SCHOOL PRINCIPALS LEADING TOWNSHIP SCHOOLS

by SHAHISTA SYED, student no. 219086788.

To the best of my knowledge, all the proposed amendments have been effected and the work is free of spelling and grammatical errors. I am of the view that the quality of language used meets generally accepted academic standards.

Yours faithfully



DR S. GOVENDER

B Paed. (Arts), B.A. (Hons), B Ed.
Cambridge Certificate for English Medium Teachers
MPA, D. Admin.