

UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULU-NATAL

LIFE HISTORIES OF THREE AFRICAN WOMEN
SCHOOL PRINCIPALS IN THE
ETHEKWINI REGION

BY

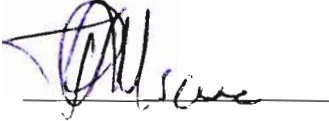
MSANE THOKOZILE PATIENCE

DISSERTATION SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE MASTERS OF
EDUCATION DEGREE
(EDUCATION MANAGEMENT)

SUPERVISOR : PROF. THENGANI NGWENYA

DECLARATION

I, Thoko Msane, declare that this dissertation is my own work and has not been submitted previously for any degree in any university.



MSANE T.P.

(RESEARCHER)

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

TO MY MOTHER

For the acknowledgement you accord me that feeds me the courage to reach higher.

TO TUKI

For your selflessness, patience and understanding.

TO THE RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

For accepting my intrusions and for sharing your personal experiences.

TO MY SUPERVISOR

For sharing your knowledge, sensitivity and understanding.

ABSTRACT

Relying on the standard conventions and techniques of life-history methodology in the Social Sciences, this study explores the professional or career histories of selected women principals in the EThekweni region. The study examines the relationship between gender and self-portrayal on the one hand, and gender and school leadership, on the other hand. Thus the central focus of the study is on the different ways in which women principals define themselves and are defined by others, especially their colleagues and the communities served by their schools.

The study also looks at the ways in which key management structures such as School Management Teams (SMTs) and School Governing Bodies (SGBs) deal with the issues relating to gender equality in school leadership, management and governance. The dissertation also tackles the complex relationship between private (personal) and professional identities and how these are constructed and continually re-constructed within the context of school management and leadership.

The study is recognizably qualitative in orientation and therefore does not set out to formulate general principles about gender and school management. Instead the intention is to gain some insight into the relatively unique lives of individual women managers in education.

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CHAPTER ONE

THE STUDY IN CONTEXT

1.1 INTRODUCTION

This study examines the professional histories of three African women school principals. By combining the life history and the case study approaches, the study focuses on their professional or career histories, management experiences and the role of interpretation of their responsibilities as women managers. This interpretation is in relation to the role of School Governing Bodies (SGBs) and School Management Teams (SMTs) in managing the schools as institutions of learning, as well as the school communities at large. This is done through examining the relationship between gender on the one hand, and school leadership, on the other hand. The study explores various ways in which women principals construct their professional identities as leaders of schools operating within management and governance structures created in terms of government policies and legislation.

The study further foregrounds the issue of gender as the central determinant of professional identity construction. How women are perceived by their colleagues and by the members of the communities they serve and how they see themselves thus become central concerns in the study. The thesis is that all three women's 'perceptions' of their roles contribute in various ways in the construction of their professional identities. Issues related to race and class are also interrogated although they are peripheral to the study's central purpose.

The research for this study was conducted between 2003 and 2004. Data for the study, obtained through semi-structured interviews, allowed for an in-depth exploration of the lives of the research participants in terms of their experiences as school managers. Each woman selected, represents a microscopic and personalised view of her gendered and socialized experiences as an African woman. The study was motivated by the landscape

of gender sensitive policies (The *Education White Paper* of 1995, the *Employment Equity Bill* of 1997, the *Constitution of the Republic of South Africa* No. 108 of 1996, the *South African Schools Act* No. 84 of 1996 and *Procedures Manual for Processing School-Based Promotions* of 1999) introduced by the government after 1994's first democratic elections. These policies and laws mandated the appointment of previously disadvantaged sectors (including African women).

1.2 RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY

The inspiration to undertake this study comes from my own involvement with gender equity issues, both as a manager and an African woman. The main controversy in the study, I want to argue, is that gender issues in education management and the need to address them have not become the subject of interest for policymakers, especially with regard to the experiences of African women principals as leaders in schools. Gender issues need to be systematically and scientifically explored so that gender bias may be addressed and dealt with in the interest of post 1994 aspirations for education system. Although research in Western countries shows that women's work and lives are inextricably linked to gender, gender issues in their own right, have still to receive the kind of attention they deserve in the South African context.

The relatively few studies that exist on women in leadership positions tend to focus on their job performance and ignore the fundamental, personal and humanistic dimensions of management and leadership. Very few for instance, have examined the different ways in which black women principals perceive their roles and functions as managers and leaders. It is the contention of this study that African women principals' voices should be heard and their views be central to revealing the impact of gender on their lives and careers.

With the patriarchal African cultural background, I grew under a constant reminder that I am different from males. Everything about me bore the stamp of this gender consciousness. I gradually began to accept my culturally defined status of "femaleness".

This shaped the way I understood my role in profound ways. As a woman principal these stereotypes still influenced my style of management in subtle, and sometimes not so subtle ways. I am not trying to encourage African women to lose their grace as women, nor am I motivating women to disrespect men. Being a woman leader in the area of your own choice and command does not mean defiance and disrespect for others. Women can rise to the greatest heights of life with all the humility and grace, love and care in their command. By examining the relationship these African women principals have with School Governing Bodies, School Management Teams and school communities at large, I want to explore the problem of women subordination to men.

The main issue to be tackled in this study revolves around the ways in which school leadership is shaped by expectations, beliefs, preconceptions and stereotypes associated with gender. By examining the relationships these African women principals have with School Governing Bodies, School Management Teams and school communities at large, I intend to explore the relationship between gender and school leadership. The life history methodology used in this study is linked to the key concern of the study: to examine the interface between the private and public lives of African women principals.

Against the backdrop of the above scenario, this study is undertaken for the following reasons:

- Prejudice against women and stereotypes tend to remain unchanged (Prinsloo, 1992 and Sparrius, 1995). The study will highlight how this prejudice in its various forms is affecting the three African women principals. Although the aim of the study is not to formulate general principles, it will provide rich qualitative data on the resources and strategies that African women principals utilise to define their roles, functions and relationships with colleagues. Therefore the study looks at modes of self-definition and how these shape the leadership styles and attitudes of the selected African women principals.
- Prior to the 1994 general elections, different education departments were based on policies of inequality amongst different racial and gender groups. These policies co-existed with traditional gender stereotypes which have for centuries assigned

women to a lower position in society and leadership roles. Such policies laid a favourable ground for men not to accept women leadership as effective. This study will highlight how these stereotypes are affecting the leadership styles of the three African women principals chosen to participate in this study.

- After the transformation of the Public Service within the new legislative framework, the KwaZulu-Natal department of education committed itself to fair labour practices without clearly formulating strategies for implementation. Currently there is evidence suggesting that clear strategies for implementing transformation are in place. Examples of these include “Women In and Into Management Empowerment” Programme and “Assertiveness Training and Career Development Training” Programme.
- Too often the ‘voice’ of women in research has been neglected and therefore questions like “Who am I?” are not heard. This study aims to foreground women as participants and to give them a ‘voice’ to express their experiences as managers. However, the aim is not to formulate a set of general principles to explore the uniqueness of each manager’s professional experience. Nevertheless, a number of issues common to most women managers in education are likely to emerge from the unique and idiosyncratic narratives of the chosen participants.

1.3 POLICIES INFORMING THE STUDY

One of the post 1994 government’s foremost tasks has been to transform the public service into an effective instrument capable of delivering equitable services to all citizens and of driving the country’s economic and social development. However, the government’s ability to do so has been hampered by, amongst other things, issues related to race and gender. In order to change this situation, significant interventions were required.

It was therefore against this background that the following policies were formulated:

1.3.1 THE EDUCATION WHITE PAPER (1995)

The Education White Paper called for the establishment of gender equality. It reported that women suffer discrimination and ill treatment, male domination and sexual harassment, among other forms of abuse. The White Paper (1995) also asserted that the values and gender role patterns of South African women had much to do with South Africa's values of patriarchal dominance.

The country is signatory to the Convention for the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). CEDAW calls for the elimination of discrimination against women and the establishment of equal rights with men in education, adequate educational provision, and for the state to adopt appropriate measures to achieve these aims. The CEDAW declaration was signed by the government of South Africa in 1993. In terms of this declaration, all people in schools and within the department of education as a whole should be treated as individuals, with their own strength and weaknesses, their own particular problems and training needs.

1.3.2 THE EMPLOYMENT EQUITY ACT (1997)

The purpose of the Act was to achieve equality in the workplace by:

- a) Promoting equal opportunity and fair treatment in employment through the elimination of unfair discrimination; and
- b) Implementing positive measures to redress the disadvantages in employment experienced by black people, women ... to ensure their equitable representation in all occupational categories and levels in the workplace.

In accordance with South Africa's vision of the principle of gender equality, the National Department of Education took the lead to appoint a Gender Equity Task Team (GETT). The GETT Report identified numerous concerns with regard to the sexism in school.

Based on the attention the National Department of Education at ministerial level paid to the education department's commitment to equity, the establishment of the GETT was to focus on formulating guidelines to establish a Gender Equity Unit (GEU) in the National Department of Education. The proposed structure for gender equity in education drew on local and international experience of institutionalising gender policy, planning and implementation (Wolpe *et al*, 1997).

Subsequently, in 1996, Parliament passed a legislation that made provision for the Commission for Gender Equity (CGE), an independent body, to act as a watchdog for gender equity. The objectives of the CGE were:

- a) To monitor, investigate, research, educate, lobby, advise and report on issues concerning gender equality.
 - b) To promote gender equality and to advise and to make recommendations to Parliament or any other legislature with regard to any laws or proposed laws or proposed legislation which affect gender equality and the status of women.
- (Basson 1995:183)

1.3.3 THE CONSTITUTION OF THE REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA NO. 108 OF 1996

The demand for gender equality is also present in the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa. The Constitution is the supreme law of the Republic. It ensures equality for all the citizens, regardless of race, sex, religion, and prohibits other discriminatory practices. The Republic of South Africa is one, sovereign and democratic state founded on the following values, amongst others:

- a) Human dignity, the achievement of equality and the advancement of human rights and freedoms;
- b) Non-racism and non-sexism

The Bill of Rights within the Constitution is a cornerstone of democracy in South Africa. It enshrines the rights of all people in our country, and affirms the democratic values of human dignity, equality and freedom.

The Constitution ensures equality for everyone, as well as the protection and benefit of the law. This includes the full and equal enjoyment of all rights and freedoms. To promote the achievement of equality, legislative and other measures designed to protect or advance persons, or categories of persons, disadvantaged by unfair discrimination may be taken.

1.3.4 THE SOUTH AFRICAN SCHOOLS ACT NO. 84 OF 1996

The previously segregated schools now fall under one department of education and are governed by the *South African Schools Act*. It is this Act that allows for the election of School Governing Bodies (SGBs) at each of the schools.

Some of the allocated functions of the School Governing Bodies are to contribute to the development of the schools and see to the school's governance. Each of the functions is coupled with "responsibility". Therefore discriminatory practices based on gender are discouraged. Having seen the effects of socialisation on gender, School Governing Bodies should help create an environment conducive to the equitable development of both females and males in both the governance and management structures of schools. Evidently, School Governing Bodies have a major role to play in bringing about gender equality in schools. Gender inequality in the ranks of the education sector was but one problem in the South African education system before 1994. The system was shaped by inequality in terms of government and appointment to management positions.

Apartheid presented women in the teaching sector with yet another discrimination hurdle. Wolpe *et al* (1997) assert that the discrimination that kept women out of certain positions was instituted through apartheid. Hendrick Verwoerd's introduction of the *Bantu*

Education Act of 1954 (Wolpe *et al*, 1997) demonstrated the sexist and racist ideology behind the historical positioning of women in the education sector:

As a woman is by nature so much fitted for handling young children, and as the great majority of Bantu children are to be found in the lower classes of primary school, it follows that there should be far more female than male teachers. The department will therefore...declare the assistant posts in... primary schools to be female teachers' posts. Quotas will be laid down at training schools as regards numbers of male and female candidates respectively which may be allowed to enter for the courses... this measure will, in the course of time, bring about a considerable saving of funds...(Wolpe *et al* 1997:197).

As a result of the National Department of Education's stance on gender equality, the year 1999 heralded a period when more women were promoted to management positions than at any other time in South African history. This was a result of the manual (*Procedure Manual for Processing School-Based Promotions*, 1999) handed by the Department of Education in KwaZulu-Natal with the specific mandate on factors that could be advanced for preferring one candidate over another are:

- Affirmative action,
- Measures for designated groups, and
- Gender.

Despite official policy and genuine efforts to implement recommendations regarding the advancement of females in management positions, a large number of males in dominant positions continue to prevail as a result of the advantages enjoyed historically by males.

1.4 THE STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

African women principals feel that they are not recognised and respected by the society and their peers as leaders. Historically, African women have taken the stance of living up

to the roles society expects of them as wives and caregivers. They perceive these roles to be feminine roles and perceive positions of leadership as being masculine. It could be argued that South African women, especially African women, have been socialised to be passive and to be subservient to men. The impact of tradition and culture to the role of women leaders is critical because different communities have different expectations of women. Significantly, all three informants selected for this study are African.

Despite the changes that have taken place in the country over the past ten years, management is still a masculinist enterprise. Truscott (1994) in his assessment of the South African education system, largely contends that “in all schools gender bias operates through the fact that whilst most teachers are women, most principals are men.”

In an age when education opportunities and leadership positions open to females, it becomes crucial to investigate reasons why society still thinks that male headship is better than female headship. According to researchers, this phenomenon can be explained in terms of institutionalised and unquestioned social patterns and cultural dispositions. Educational changes in the country require that we redefine the concept of career and management to include women’s experiences and to retain the richness and diversity of women’s definitions of career, without constantly having to face the hurdles and discrimination by patriarchal ways of understanding the world.

The basis for employment in the previous education departments was based on the past government policies of inequality among different racial and gender groups. These policies co-existed with traditional gender stereotyping, which has for decades assigned women to lower positions in society as well as in leadership roles. These gender inequalities have been cultured and simultaneously perpetuated through socialisation throughout history. Predominant religious thoughts have also contributed towards beliefs that women’s leadership skills in education in particular and society in general, are relatively poor and ineffective compared to those of men. In South Africa this was also entrenched by the apartheid government in the constitution and in policies that influenced organisational practices.

Despite the reluctance of many people to accept women as principals, research suggests that women are indeed effective school leaders. Smith (1978) reports that women principals are typically more skilled than men in building positive school climates, perceiving and solving problems, and facilitating positive school and community relations. He further argues that experience and exposure suggest that there are fewer women principals than men and that women school leaders tend to be concentrated at the junior levels where they are likely to supervise female educators. Although they have the same title as their male colleagues, women principals are rarely viewed as equals either by their male colleagues or by their male and female colleagues.

1.5 THE AIMS OF THE STUDY

The aims of the study are to explore:

- Gender as the central determinant of identity construction of the three African women school principals.
- The degree to which these principals are perceived by school governing bodies, school management teams and teachers in their command.
- How their gender status as women affects their leadership styles.
- The links between their private lives and their professional lives.

1.6 THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The significance of this explorative study lies in its response to the demand for gender studies in education, especially with regards to the experiences of African women principals. Gender resentment has become a powerful force that causes most women to realise that a loss has been suffered in more ways than one. Men have, for a long time, experienced opportunities where the presence of women messed up everything. To them the present dispensation is reverse discrimination, which takes away opportunities that were traditionally available to them.

The KwaZulu Natal Department of Education and Culture recognises the need to transform schools by enforcing equality measures to serve the purpose of the *Employment Equity Act*. Looking at the purpose of the Act, the challenges facing the schools go beyond concentrating on issues of discrimination or making gender equity an issue to do with human resources by definition, elimination of the discrimination in schools also creates diversity. This diversity consists of visible and non-visible differences which will include factors such as background, personality, and others. Diversity is founded on the premise that harnessing these differences will create a productive environment in which everybody feels valued, where their talents are being fully utilised and in which goals are met (Billsberry: 1996).

1.7 CRITICAL QUESTIONS

The study seeks to answer the following critical questions:

- What are the experiences of African women in positions of leadership?
- How do these African women interpret or understand their roles within the confines of gender?
- How do black women principals construct their professional identities as leaders of public schools?

1.8 THE SCOPE OF THE STUDY

This study relates stories of three African women principals, one from an urban area, one from a semi-urban area and one from a rural area. All three research participants are from the Ethekewini Region. These African women principals lived, schooled and trained in government areas and institutions designated as black by the apartheid government.

The main objective of the study is not merely to compare experiences of these women and those of men, but to relate stories and experiences of the research participants in

relation to their management experiences. Although gender and race are inextricably interwoven in the experiences of women, I want to explore the degree of gender experiences of women from the same race.

The study was undertaken between 2003 and 2004, almost a decade after the democratisation of South Africa, but it is evident that transformation in the schools where these African women principals are from is horrifyingly slow.

1.9 THE LAYOUT OF CHAPTERS

Chapter One provides a preamble of the study. It describes the personal motivation and rationale for undertaking the study, examines policies informing the study, explains the statement of the problem, states the aims, the significance of the study and outlines critical questions and the scope of the study.

Chapter Two provides the literature review on gender and education and explains the theory framework of feminist theory and shows how it can apply to the position of African women principals.

Chapter Three analyses the research design used in the study. Here I describe the methodology used and give the rationale for using the qualitative approach. The sample selection and sampling of the respondents are also discussed in this chapter. I also describe data collection, gaining access, data analysis, data reduction, ethical measures and triangulation. The chapter concludes with the discussion of the role of the researcher as an instrument.

Chapter Four follows with a presentation of life histories of each research participant in their own words. This is followed by the analysis of each story.

Chapter Five provides a summary and conclusions of the study.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 INTRODUCTION

In support of my belief that African women principals' management experiences seem to have been largely neglected in the research arena in South Africa, this chapter explores the literature available and outlines the theoretical framework used in this study.

According to Truscott (1994), the emphasis in South African education research writings has been on class and race and not on the issue of gender. Edmondson and Nkomo, (2001) echoed this in their study of black woman managers in the private sector.

“As black women academics going through twist and turns in our careers, we become curious about the career experiences of black women executives. When we looked to the managerial literature, we were dismayed to find little information. Take for example, the ground-breaking books on women managers: *'Managerial Women'* written by Marilyn Hennig and Ann Jardin, which did not include one black woman manager in its sample. *'Breaking the Glass Ceiling'* by Anne Morrison and her colleagues contained only three black women in its sample, effectively precluding any meaningful study of both race and gender. Subsequent books on women managers such as the 1993 *'Members of the Club; the Coming of Age of Executive Women'* by Dawn-Marie Driscoll and Carol Goldberg reflect the same omission”. (Edmondson E.L.J. and Nkomo S.M. 2001:1-2).

The theoretical or analytical framework outlined in this chapter provides specific details about my perception of fundamental theories of leadership and school governance in relation and comparison to what is outlined in the literature. Since this is a narrative study

of the lives of women, I also interrogate ways in which society interacts as a result of issues of gender and class as informed by Feminist Theory.

In doing so, in this study I explore how the different theories can help one to understand the historical, social and cultural practices which constitute identity by examining the life stories of three African women school principals in the Ethekekwini region as leaders of schools. The following quote lays a foundation for this theoretical perspective:

“We are moving from a paradigm with a focus on quantity and efficiency to a paradigm based on quality and effectiveness” (Artis cited in Haroon Mahomed:1997).

Key issues in the current system of education in South Africa today are, among others:

- A need for leadership that identifies and seeks to provide a base for organizational goal achievement;
- The establishment of an honest and open relationship through a process of team building and parameter exploring by both the school governing bodies and school principals; and
- The creation of an organizational climate that suits one’s leadership style and allows and encourages one’s natural style and natural self.

2.2 LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature that I review in this study is organised around three subheadings:

- Gender
- Leadership
- School governance.

2.2.1 GENDER

A number of recent studies on the role of gender within the South African education system describe how women experience both formal and informal discrimination and

oppression (Truscott 1994). According to Truscott, legislative discrimination operated via the structures of apartheid. Informal discrimination was through gendered labour division. Kotecha (1994) suggests that discriminatory practices against, and the oppression of, women, can be traced to the patriarchal character of society. Educational administration in South Africa has traditionally been, and remains, male dominated. A viewpoint held by both Kotecha (1994) and Truscott (1994) is that women are grossly under-represented in management positions.

It is interesting to note that gender has not figured prominently in discussion of education management, apart from discussions of gender differences in the numbers and the distribution of education management posts. It is fair to say that existing literature on women in educational administration in the country could profit from increased empirical research. The traditional literature in the USA and Europe on school administration largely ignores and excludes women. It tells us little about their past or present lives, nor do we hear of their struggles. Only recently has there been an interest by female researchers in examining current theory and practice regarding the impact of gender (Shakeshaft, 1989).

Literature on this issue has been published in the USA and Europe. There are few published research texts on gender leadership styles in the South African education context. Research findings on gender differences in school management have been complex and at times contradictory. No significant differences have been found in terms of the definition of objectives, perceptions of the organisation or task completion in school management practices. However, as regards the manner in which tasks are carried out and the style of leadership, gender has been shown to be a differentiating variable.

As Evetts (1991) informs us: "In America also, most of the research on gender differences in leadership styles has been fairly small-scale and relatively inconclusive". The document further notes that female principals were more effective at resolving conflicts or motivating teachers and acting as representatives rather than directors of a group. Adkinson (1981) suggests that females, as compared to male principals, were

likely to be involved in instructional supervision to demonstrate a more democratic leadership style and concern themselves with students. Such differences were confirmed by Shakeshaft's (1989) analysis of the woman principal as manager and administrator.

Research literature suggests that it is the complex, varied and rich experience of women's lives which contributes to their particular management styles and capacities. The emphasis is on the positive and the possibility of success without emulating the male norm of management (Shakeshaft 1989). Women in management are subject to pressures experienced by men, although, as argued in the literature, they may share the same work pressures. Walker (1993) contends that whilst African women in management share the same experiences as other women managers, they are subject to other experiences unique to them as women.

Literature relating to women's traditional roles varies from culture to culture and the ideologies are deeply embedded in cultural practices. All cultures have examples of such behaviour. Forms of male domination exist among all ethnic groups although they take different forms that accord with cultural practices for example, some religious texts may be interpreted in ways which legitimate women's subordination. In 1954 at the meeting of the Federal of South African Women in which the Women's Charter drawn up by the Federation leaders was discussed, most delegates accepted without question that women's primary identification would be the home and issues related to the home (Cheryl Walker, 1982; 155). In other words, there was a lag between the way in which women identified with deeply held beliefs about women's roles in various aspects of their lives. These beliefs are embedded in cultural practices and other aspects of our society. It is these cultural aspects that are likely to come into conflict with the belief that calls for gender equality.

In an unpublished qualitative research report to the Gender Equity Task Team by Ms L. Fredman, on the experiences of 150 African women teachers, it is mentioned that during the course of the research, both men and women consistently suggested that women themselves were responsible for their low status. Associated with this are well

documented doubts women have of their capacity to hold leadership positions. They revealed that their current experiences replicated their experiences as learners. Now they leave all decision-making to male colleagues, even when men are in the minority. The women found that when they made points during meetings they were ignored, while the same issues, if made by men, were accepted.

Wolpe *et al* (1997) state that there is still evidence that careers are not compatible with home life, hence women with careers experience two kinds of “guilt feelings”:

- They do not devote enough time to their roles as mothers and wives.
- They do not devote enough time to their careers.

Strategic interests correspond to the demands made by women’s movements in Europe and America from the late 1960 onwards. They are concerned with eradicating all forms of female subordination and creating a just environment for women. These movements, together with other mass women’s movements, generated the development of demands for equality among international bodies such as the United Nations and UNESCO. They also contributed to women’s movements, culminating in the 1996 mass meeting in Beijing with its programme of action.

It was during the late 1980s and early 1990s that the South African liberation movement became concerned with women’s interests; practical or strategic. Such issues then became legitimate areas for discussion at an organisational level. By 1990 there was a significant shift in the official African National Congress position regarding the elimination of women subordination as an acknowledged goal. In 1990 the African National Congress issued a statement recognising that there had been centuries of “women subjugation”, simultaneously promoting the notion that it was only colonialism and industrialisation that had introduced inequality into African societies. The document established the need to “take appropriate measures to ensure the principle of gender equality”, and called for “a systematic programme of formal and informal education to

promote an understanding of the origin and the effects of gender oppression on our people” (ANC 1995: 22)

Post 1994 marked the situation where the multi-party Women’s National Coalition set out a charter called “The Women’s Charter for Effective Equality”. It was a populist movement differing markedly from the Western world’s movements. The demands of the Charter were couched in terms of egalitarianism and practical interests.

Women’s subordinate position is embedded in virtually all social systems. Girls are taught that their interests are less important than those of boys from an early age. It is through this that the system of inequality is perpetuated. Apart from aspects of women’s subordination that reflect cultural practices, the legacy of apartheid and its effects on many fields of education cannot be overlooked.

Hill and Ragland (1995) assert that women are faced with internal barriers ranging from lack of personal confidence to a fear of challenging the cultural expectations of their role. Shakeshaft (1993) seem to provide reasons for Hill and Ragland’s (1995) argument. He bases this erosion of self-esteem on lifelong effects of harassment and abuse levelled at female students by their male peers. He further asserts that practices of discrimination based on gender are subtle and are not coded by the sender or receiver. Studies of women in school administration reveal that the majority of women interviewed respond in the negative to the question of personal discrimination.

Measor and Sikes (1992) concur that women in senior positions at schools do not provide examples of “success”, as they do not challenge traditional stereotypes. The message passed on is that it is normal for male authority to be enforced.

Archer and Lloyd (1992) assert that stereotypes reinforce the idea of “men’s work” and “women’s work”, and thereby influence gender differences in management. They suggest that gender stereotypes affect women’s expectations of their own performance. The very description of being “forceful, enterprising, assertive, confident, rational and

tough” (Archer and Lloyd, 1992: 235) typifies success in high profile jobs. Female adjectives such as soft-headed, sentimental, talkative, gentle and emotional, make women unsuitable for high occupational achievement.

2.2.2 LEADERSHIP

As with the previous subheading on gender, the literature used is largely based on Western rather than local conceptions of leadership. Thus I will emphasize the usefulness and relevance of Western experiences within our own context. However, I should point out that the roles of specific managers do not depend entirely on Western perceptions of leadership. It is the context and current political order that determine what may be perceived as leadership. The ministry of education defines leadership in line with the perceptions of the government it serves. It is rare to find, for example, a minister of education coming up with a totally different view of effective leadership from that of the rest of the politicians in the same political formation.

Leadership has been the subject of world-wide debate and research and leaders from all walks of life have been studied and analysed in an attempt to discover what makes a leader. From politics to business, researchers have endeavoured to define and categorise leadership. Education, with its pivotal role in society, has experienced an intensive period of reform and renewal, with leadership being a focal point. This has led educationalists, governments and society to struggle in finding new models of leadership. Much has also been written about how leadership and management fit together.

The concepts of leadership and management are inter-linked and inter-dependent. The two factors hold together and develop all other aspects. Management is defined, on the one hand, as the art of getting things done through other people, the forecasting, planning, organising and co-ordinating of organisational activities, and on the other hand, leadership is viewed as the rightful position to lead, motivate, influence, and, at the same time, be willing to be influenced by those you are working with. To be a leader in the

modern sense of the word means to be able to keep up with the pressure and demonstrate willingness to work with others in a systematic, supportive and a healthy way.

According to Donald *et al* in DoE (1997) leadership is the art of doing the right thing at the right time. In a school context, leadership is primarily concerned with giving direction, sustaining the vision and mission of the school and inspiring without dominating other members of the organisation, while management is also about holding the school tight and ensuring that all set goals, objectives, visions and missions are successfully achieved.

Educational leadership, according to Chibber (1993), is the process by which school managers direct and influence educators and learners to perform educational tasks. In order to achieve these tasks school leaders must create and establish an environment to assist all educators and learners to work to their full potential. Therefore educational leadership is largely about influencing behaviour to achieve educational excellence. Leadership is about dealing appropriately with people. If leaders are to influence other people they need to understand people: their personalities, what motivates them, their values and the difficulties they experience in life. Educational leaders need to build interpersonal relationships based on a philosophy of respect for human dignity. Furthermore, values, behaviour and leadership styles, need to be constantly checked, as it is their own character that is critical in influencing other to follow them.

Donald *et al* in DoE (1997) asserts that an effective school is one in which leadership and management capacity is developed in all members of the school community. This is likely to happen effectively if there are ongoing personal and professional development processes and structural support from within. School effectiveness cannot be achieved if leadership is perceived to be the concern of one person in the organisation. School leadership as well as management is a collective responsibility, though there is a need for one person to direct and guide the group.

Ken Melrose, (cited in Spears 1998) believes that leadership is not a position, it is a combination of skills and competence that one shows and uses to enable others to learn and make progress towards mutual goals. Melrose concludes that when a leader creates an environment conducive to personal growth, people rise to their potential and beyond.

Northfield (cited in the DoE Training Manual for School Governing Bodies, 2003), states that leadership involves the performance of specific functions necessary to create conditions for change and effectiveness. Research in the early and mid 80's identifies three key functions as determinants of an effective leadership i.e.

- Instructional support functions;
- Instructional leadership functions; and
- Team functions for facilitating change.

The basis for the critique of these functions is drawn from the recent developments in South African education policy formulation and implementation guided by the *South African Schools Act*, No 84 of 1996.

2.2.2.1 INSTRUCTIONAL SUPPORT FUNCTIONS

Central to this function is the visible commitment of those who are involved in the leadership. The determinant feature of the success of the institution lies in the manner in which explicit strategies are identified and implemented. This implies that if there is a need to improve the quality of learning in schools, there is a great need for the assessment of the present strengths of the education leaders and their views and concerns regarding student's learning and their progress.

The leader of the school in this instance should be at the centre stage. The principal needs to develop a strategy to work and contribute significantly towards finding a balance between the needs of the school and that of the community the school is serving. This is done in view of projecting the school's purposes and reflective needs and interests in formulating policies, ethos and the culture of the school Sayer and Williams (1989).

2.2.2.2 INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP FUNCTIONS

Weber's study (1971) in Walker *et al* (1991) discovered that strong instructional leadership and high expectations are key elements of school effectiveness. Instructional leadership conditions the setting of educational priorities to achieve outcomes. What is being done in this regard is to acquire maximum resources and monitor the use of such resources. Inevitably, there is a need to continuously assess the progress of the school in the light of the resources that have been made available for that specific purpose.

For the school leader to achieve this function, he/she needs to communicate his/her expectations to parents of learners. Sayer and Williams (1989) argue that schools have to promote themselves with the objective of not reflecting badly on their neighbourhood community, but reflecting critically on the education provision in the area as a whole. The principal in this regard is to manage this entire process and the relations the school has with the broader community it is serving.

Instructional policy-making forms the core of this function area. This therefore, means that the responsibility lies with the head to ensure that there is an effective implementation of any decisions that have been reached. Bhana (1999) found that many principals in schools serve more managerial and administrative functions than to instructional leadership roles.

Within the context of the decentralized system of schooling in South Africa, principals are supposed to assume increased administration functions and decreased instructional functions, but the problem is that this is in direct contrast with what the *South African Schools Act* advocates. Basing one's argument on the reality of the context of many South African schools, it is essential to stress the need for tacit advocacy of a new view of instructional leadership in South African schools.

2.2.2.3 TEAM FUNCTIONS FOR FACILITATING CHANGE

Team functions for facilitating change put provision of resources at the top of the agenda of the school organisation. In this category, as in the instructional leadership function, there is a need for training of those who are involved in this process of change. The use of resources, as intended for educational purposes, should be towards the achievement of intended goals and outcomes.

The Human Resource dimension is very important and it should be given the necessary level of consideration by the leadership. The leadership needs to devolve power to various levels of the structure and develop a multidirectional pattern of communication amongst those who are working proactively in the process of change. What is rather critical here is the commitment of the school management teams to develop a positive approach among their staff to learn to accept change without resisting it.

Bean (1993) states that any organisation that brings people and resources together to create their product or service benefit from improved planning and productivity. The critical part that leadership plays in this regard is that of resource management. Evidently, gender plays an important role in human resource management.

Key issues that need to be considered before a principal gives the staff the responsibility to manage resources include the following:

- Their level of commitment to organizational growth and development;
- Their consistency in the organisation; and
- How they perceive the whole proposed process of change.

It is important to stress that educational change is a process, and not a product or a destination. It is for the principal, teachers, school management team, and the entire school community to take the lead in the process of change, and not the legislation. Whitaker (1993) also argues that changes from educational practices usually come from educational practitioners themselves rather than through legislation. Policy studies in

developing countries show that there is tension between the national policy makers and grass roots practitioners. As Whitaker (1993) puts it: “the nature of professional specialism tends to inhibit the government from intervening in areas which they have no training and expertise to affect”. Whitaker (1993) further asserts that intervention by the national government can be regarded as a symptom of change rather than the cause for it.

The critical challenge facing educational managers is to know how to facilitate the process of change within the school context to cope with the wider framework of change in the national arena. Teachers are faced with the challenge of creating an effective environment in which the learning of pupils can be more effective. The toughest possible way in which such a challenge could be met is if the leadership were to involve all stakeholders in the day-to-day management of the school. In this way participants in school activities would be given a platform to air their views, visions and objectives. The ability to manage change effectively and productively is one of the key factors that determine effective school leadership.

2.2.3 SCHOOL GOVERNANCE

The new governance policy places enormous legal and practical responsibilities on school principals and their school governing bodies. The success (or failure) of these new reforms depends entirely upon how the school governing body and the school principal lead their communities in the endeavour to achieve the fundamental objectives of the new policy. Furthermore, reforms of such nature and magnitude pose challenges to implementers and those who will be affected by such reforms. They will also affect existing relationships.

The Education Reform Acts of 1986 and 1988 introduced reforms in education governance in Britain and in Wales. These reforms spearheaded the transfer of governance responsibilities from education professionals to lay persons. This impacted positively and negatively on relationships between school principals and their school governing bodies in Britain and Wales.

These effects which were brought about by this policy provide valuable experience to South Africans. In an attempt to evaluate the impact of this new governance policy on school principals, the experience of the British and the Welsh was used as the basis. Much of it is drawn from the vast literature that emerged after the implementation of the above mentioned acts.

Below I will explore the challenges, change dynamics and relationships issues that came about with the introduction of education policy in South African reforms, as well as the impact of changing roles and responsibilities of the school governing bodies and school principals.

2.2.3.1 CHALLENGES, CHANGE DYNAMICS AND RELATIONSHIPS IN EDUCATION REFORM

The new South African governance policy expects the school governing body and the school principal to play a key role in the transformation of their school community. Therefore, if the school governing bodies intend to assist in the transformation of South African society, they must start by transforming themselves and their school communities. With his classic work “The Culture of the School and the Problem of Change”, Seymour (1994) remarked that: “one cannot understand the failure of efforts to change and improve schools unless one deals with school community relationships and their largely implicit character implicit that is until the tradition cultured features are pushed into the fore front by conflict and controversy”.

Seymour (1994) further maintains that unless reformers build constituencies, both within schools and within communities, most reform efforts will fail. School governing bodies and school principals, in their bid to comply with the *South African Schools Act* of 1996 and the *Constitution of South Africa* of 1996, will have to change their ethos, values, cultures and norms of the past. However, existing routines, norms and expectations are often solidly entrenched and efforts to reform or eliminate them are often confronted by

resistance (passive or active), bitterness and conflict. To avoid conflicts, a plan will have to be drawn up by all stakeholders to facilitate the implementation of the process of change. The prescriptions of *South African Schools Act* as well as the *Constitution of South Africa* demand that all school communities commit themselves to the change process if they aim to attain the objectives of the new governance policy. School principals and the school governing bodies will have to occupy a leading role in this regard.

Secondly, innovation or change means different things to different people, thus effecting change calls for open-mindedness and readiness to understand the feelings of others. According to Everand and Morris (1986), implementing change is a process of interaction, dialogue, feedback, modifying objectives, recycling plans, coping with mixed feelings and values, micro-politics, frustration, patience and muddle. This calls upon the school principals and school governing bodies to introduce and manage the process of change with all the care it deserves. It will do them good if they can involve everyone whom the change is likely to impact upon from the inception phase until the implementation phase. Feedback should be given regularly to all stakeholders.

Fullan (1992) has this to say, "Serious reform is not a single innovation, it is changing the culture and structure of an organisation". School principals and the school governing bodies have to know that restructuring the composition of their school governing bodies alone is inadequate. One or the other have to alter the values, norms and attitudes that governed and characterised all past practices.

From this point, it is clear that there are many major challenges and possibilities confronting the school principals and the school governing bodies. It is a daunting task that requires commitment, willingness to work hard and a lot of pain and sacrifice. Their inability to deal with these possibilities and major challenges may harm their relations and the governance of their schools will be in turn be adversely affected.

An important aspect of the *South African Schools Act* is the principle of partnership or co-operative governance by all stakeholders who have an interest in education. These are the state, parents, learners, educators and members of the community. The ideal relationship, as envisaged by the Act, should be characterised by the following:

- Mutual trust and respect;
- Shared decision-making;
- Shared goals and values;
- Common vision;
- Open communication;
- Promotion of interest of partnership rather than of individual; and
- Respect for roles of different partners.

The successful carrying out of tasks as demanded by the Act will depend on the extent to which school principals and the school governing bodies change their attitudes and relationships. School principals as “valued participants” will have to adapt to new notions of leadership changing from implementers to initiators, from compliance officers to entrepreneurial risk takers, from bureaucratic managers to collaborative colleagues. Murphy and Louis (1992) summed this up in the following way; “They must learn to lead, not from the apex of the organizational pyramid, but from a web of personal relationships. Their base of influence must be professional expertise and moral imperative rather than line authority”.

2.2.3.2 THE IMPACT OF CHANGING ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE SCHOOL GOVERNING BODIES ON SCHOOL PRINCIPALS (BRITISH AND WELSH EXPERIENCE)

It is clear from the outcomes of the studies undertaken that school principals need to acknowledge and accept the critical role played by the school governing bodies in the life of the school. It is well known that the traditional role and responsibilities that the school principal fulfilled granted them more powers. The Education Reforms Act of 1986 and

1988 reduced those powers considerably by transferring them to the school governing bodies.

As Flude and Hammer (1990) states, “The changes encompassed in the 1986 and 1988 Education Acts have a very significant effects in the contests in which maintained schools in England operate”. These Acts also brought about a shift of emphasis by school principals, from traditional political science and educational management notions of school governing bodies as one component in a much wider system of educational government, to a perspective which recognises that governors now play a major role in the running of school.

Insights that have been offered here are, one may argue, capable of being applied to South Africa, where parents and communities have a formal role to play in schools. School principals and school governing bodies need to come to terms with the changes in the way in which public education is to be governed and managed. Finally, school principals need to review their own perspective on the functions and roles of the school governing bodies if they are to continue to work successfully with their governors.

2.3 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.3.1 THEORIES OF LEADERSHIP

Another way of understanding leadership is to compare the behaviours of effective and ineffective leaders to see how successful leaders behave. To do this, I will look at the behavioural theories of leadership.

2.3.1.1 LEADERS ARE BORN NOT MADE (TRAITS THEORY)

Many people believe that leaders have certain personal qualities that make them good leaders. These leaders may have strong qualities or they are able to inspire people when they speak or they have a vision that makes people want to follow them. Exponents of

this theory have identified some of the common traits or qualities that make good leaders.

These are:

- Ability (intelligence, originality and good judgement) ;
- Achievement;
- Status;
- Sense of responsibility;
- Persistence in completing tasks;
- Energy and drive to lead;
- Willingness to take risks; and
- Capacity to organize the work of others. (Atkinson, R. R. *et al*, 1993)

In order to try and carry the study further, it is necessary to use the Western literature that has been of critical significance in this subject. For example, following the arguments by Dubin (1991), Beck and Murphy (1993), and Busher and Saran (1995), that the principal play an effective role in enacting the aims of the school. Busher and Saran (1995) argue that a key aspect of school effectiveness and the collaboration of staff lies in management processes which value contributions of staff to the aims and methods of running of the school.

The question Dubin raises here is, “What strategies or special skills or abilities does the principal as a chief executive officer need to possess that distinguish him or her from less able leaders?” In attempt to suggest a way of looking at the same question, Dubin points out that the way in which we can attempt to answer this question lies in the way in which the principal creates an atmosphere that stimulates a vital educational climate for the school community.

Bearing these issues and perspectives in mind, it may be argued that the appointment of a principal as the school’s chief executive officer has to be a thorough and highly structured process in order that candidates possess certain basic skills as they are responsible for ensuring the effectiveness and quality of service in the school. By virtue

of his or her professional role, s/he has to have the authority and leadership skills to impact directly on the quality of service in the school. To preserve this quality the principal has to maintain a high degree of control and discipline among staff and students. The principal has to maintain an orderly learning environment and regular personal contact with learners' parents as often as possible.

2.3.1.2 LEADERSHIP IS ABOUT POWER

This theory argues that if one wants to understand leadership, one needs to understand power relationships in society. Leadership always involves power. People who are appointed as leaders, like school principals, have formal power in schools. They may use their power negatively, for example, by enriching themselves and their supporters, whilst, on the other hand, they may use their power positively by working for the good of the school and the community as a whole.

In a democratic society, the other side of power is accountability. *South African Schools Act* requires the SMT's to run schools in ways that involve the community. School leaders must be prepared to explain their decisions and actions to the school community and to education departments. The need for accountability places responsibilities on principals to run the schools according to the principles of democracy and human rights and to be accountable in doing so.

The principal as 'lead learner' has to exercise some form of legitimate authority in the school to improve the quality of teaching and learning. The term 'lead learner' could mean different things to different people. In this context it means a leader in the context of teaching and learning or a captain of the school. Lead learners are school heads who continually commit themselves as leaders to organizational growth, and in particular, to students' achievement. The term also suggests that lead learners are navigators who draw and guide the ship towards a purposeful destination. It should be noted, however, that the principal does not in all cases perform her/his expected roles as it is stressed in the literature, hence we find that most principals' roles are at times perceived with suspicion.

Today's principals are faced with more challenges than any other professionals. One of the biggest challenges facing principals today is that of creating a management system at school level where all stakeholders participate in key decision-making processes. As minister Kader Asmal (2000) eloquently puts it, "the challenge facing us in South Africa is to create an education system that liberates human potential and enables our citizens to take their rightful place in all spheres of life – the economy, social and political" (The Star, 6 June 2000).

Principals are a potential resource toward school effectiveness and powerful advocates of the school's needs analysis. They work hard in collaboration with other interested members of the school community to turn the schools into public service institutions that deliver a professional service to all learners, regardless of their socio-economic backgrounds.

Following Lawn (1996), the strategy for managing schools is a necessity created out of the rise of modern schooling, its inadequate structures and cumbersome curriculum controls. Lawn (1996) maintains that a modern system of schooling, for example in modern England, emerged as a result of an interest in managing the direction of the secondary education service. Teachers had to work restlessly towards developing a new coherent view of educational practice that is relevant to their time and circumstances.

That is why in South Africa today, there is an emphasis on outcomes based education, which is moving towards the revised national curriculum statement as opposed to a content-driven type of learning. Schools also go for outcomes and effectiveness to align themselves with the demands of a rapidly changing society. Therefore effective, goal-oriented and instructional leadership is a key determinant feature of school organization. Good results would be impossible without the involvement of other teachers and parents, collaborative support and visionary leadership that secures the commitment of members of the organization.

In South Africa, particularly in the historically disadvantaged schools, the principal's leadership practices have always been viewed with grave doubts and suspicions. Such an attitude is diminishing quickly and a new view of principalship is now emerging. New and positive meaning is being attached to the concepts of principal as lead learner and chief executive of the school.

2.3.1.3 LEADERSHIP IS ABOUT GOALS AND VALUES

This theory stresses the moral aspects of leadership. The principal, as a democratic professional, should present opportunities for the whole school community to escape being 'prisoners' of, and conformists, of dogma and convention. Principals are placed in leadership positions and actions to assist in the processes of learning and change, whereby institutional values, vision, practical partnerships and educational practice are shared through mutual disclosures of mature feelings. The values that they espouse should encourage aspirations in people's lives and should determine where educators and learners direct their pedagogical energies and efforts.

Research by Angus (1998) shows that the selection and appointment of principals is mostly based on their degree of seniority and their demonstration of professional competence in various teaching and administrative areas. This implies that they are to demonstrate substantive ways of understanding organizational leadership. Their critical role is to constantly modify and preserve organizational culture. They are tasked with the "responsibility of articulating, defining and strengthening value systems that give their organizations a unique identity in the minds of participants" (Duignan) 1987 as quoted in Angus (1989).

2.3.1.3 LEADERS ARE PEOPLE WHO KNOW HOW TO DO THINGS RIGHT (SITUATIONAL THEORY)

According to this theory, a person should always think about leadership in the context of their environment. Different situations and different people require different styles of

leadership. The successful leader will be the person with the qualities most suited to the situation. The situation approach shows that leadership involves more than personal traits. Leadership also involves dealing with other people in actual situations.

It is essential that leaders learn to change their styles depending on the situation. Situational theory gives explanations for why different styles of leadership will work. There is no 'one best way' to lead all people in all situations. Different people are successful in different circumstances. A good leader in one situation is not necessarily a good leader in another.

The school principal has to discharge this responsibility by establishing trust and managing change and innovation in the organization. S/he has to do so by providing support for all civil values of the school. The head should establish trust by ensuring that the rules and regulations (including the code of conduct of the school) are appropriate, effectively promulgated, observed and periodically reviewed.

Following Busher and Saran (1995), the first ingredient of an excellent and effective school, in which relationships are good and learning is happening pleurably, is a shared value system and standards of professional practice. The school principals' critical role is to espouse and regulate certain human values and promote ethical practice in schools. I perceive this to be one of the highly valued and necessary ingredients of professional competence in an effective organization. I believe that it is the school principal who should use what Duignan (1987) calls the 'tools of culture' to build an ethos and create shared assumptions and responsibilities among staff for the achievement of school objectives.

- What are these principal's relationships with their School Governing Bodies and their School Management Teams?
- To what extent are these relationships influenced by gender?
- What are these principals coping strategies as women principals?

- What have these principals learnt from their experiences as women school principals?

These are some of the focal points central to this project. In this study I attempt to discuss and analyze the question of the three African principals' roles in meeting some of these challenges.

It is thought that the principal as head can achieve such goals if s/he is committed to institutional change, to work with staff and learners and relate to the community.

2.3.2 GOVERNANCE THEORY

Before embarking on this subheading of governance, I would like to give a synopsis of school governance policy before January 1997 and the role of school principals under the ex Department of Education and Training by whom the three participant's schools were administered.

There was provision for management councils comprised of elected parents and school principals. These committees had no say over policy matters. They were often discredited and in the majority of cases they hardly functioned. They exercised little contact with parents and teachers. However students and teacher participation in decision-making in the school was an issue of intense contestation. Many communities struggled to establish and maintain Parents, Teachers, Students Associations (PTSAs) as democratic structures in the face of official hostility.

The NEPI (1992) report claims that "In African schools there was a network of discredited and largely powerless bodies at school level". Principals were expected to carry out substantial teaching loads in addition to a range of bureaucratic functions with little or no clerical support. As such the impact of school management councils on school principals was virtually insignificant. Principals performed management and governance tasks exclusively. Consequently they were often caught up in adversarial relationships.

Their role corresponded with the role of African education in general, their purpose was to control.

Management styles encouraged under DET were authoritarian, hierarchical and top-down (Chisholm and Vally, 1996). Chisholm and Vally alleged that; "In the course of exercising their duties, school principals often became victims of the wider resistance against apartheid education even as they saw themselves as opponents of it". This was largely due to their management styles which were arbitrary, exclusive and at times inhumane. Owing to various styles of management and governance in schools, conditions also differed considerably. Suronsky (1996) also alleged that: "In African schools, schools were steeped in authoritarian culture". Characteristics thereof were firmly upheld by school principals and as such served as a breed of conflicts, animosity, hatred and mistrust. He further claimed that this caused a climate of distrust that took on various forms in different contexts. Hartshorne (1991), in turn asserted that it was in this period that the fundamental disintegration of the learning environment and a breakdown of authority and discipline in the school system occurred.

In almost none of the formerly disadvantaged schools were relationships entirely conflict free. In some schools this conflict led to complete subordination of principals to the staff whilst in others to more democratic and equal forms of authority in which there was mutual respect (Chisholm and Vally, 1997). Many problems were laid at the door of principals and their managements. Many of them lacked authority and skills to deal with these problems. Therefore control and management of schools collapsed.

The collapse in the control and management of schools was further exacerbated by the renewal of protests in the schools during 1984-1986. Protest in this period was more intense than before and had a stronger political tone than had been the case from 1976-1980 (Hartshorne, 1991). No one wanted to take responsibility for the crisis in schools. This possible total collapse of the education system for Africans was never to be allowed. Fundamental changes were necessary and had to be effected in the interest of the learners they were supposed to serve. This state of affairs could not be allowed to continue

unchallenged. It became the responsibility of all South Africans who had a stake in education and training to help build a just, equitable and democratic system for all citizens. This was echoed by Mand othersalfe in 1996, who said “Our task is to finally overcome the destructive history of apartheid education and build a solid base that will take us to the 21’st century”.

The new democratically elected government took a lead in this regard with the publication of the White Paper on Education and Training (1995) which was consequently followed by the *South African Schools Act*. With the enactment of the *South African Schools Act* in January 1997, the transformation of the entire education system became a reality. Transformation of governance of education at all levels was also legalized and effected. At school level, legally constituted school governing bodies took over governance functions and principals were left with the professional management of schools. However, school principals remained members of the school governing body on an ex officio capacity. This new Act altered the roles and responsibilities of school principals considerably.

As has been mentioned in the literature review, the implementation of the Act brought about intended and unintended effects. The study of experiences of countries that implemented similar reforms may be helpful. The Education Reforms Acts of 1986 and 1988 in Britain and Wales provided much needed assistance in their disrespect. The development of this research study rests on a conceptual framework of Mortimore and Mortimore, and Thomas.

According to Mortimore and Mortimore(1991), ”Under both the 1986 Act and the Education Reform Act, school governors had increased powers and responsibilities, the exercise of which called for a rethinking of relationships between a head teacher and his/her SGB”. In the current South African situation where we are in the process of transformation of school governance, their assertion is particularly opposite.

Thomas (1992), echoes this by maintaining that “The dilemma of school reforms arises from the relationship between the school governors and professionals within the school” He alleges that in assessing how governors discharge their responsibilities, emphasis “must” inevitably be with the head teacher and maintains that:

- Typically, the head teacher will be the principal source of advice and guidance to governors;
- A governing body may become a proper decision-making forum only if the head is prepared to sponsor the development;
- Giving assistance should imply increasing their knowledge and competence in order to be able to make their own well-informed decisions;
- The head teacher’s sponsorship will rely upon them having sets of values which cherish community participation in social institutions, and school governing bodies themselves acting with altruism.

If acknowledged, accepted and adhered to by both parties, these proposals may enhance and sustain healthy relationships between them. With such relationships existing, effective partnerships may be forged which may contribute maximally to effective governance of schools. Effective partnership if fully realized promotes involvement, commitment and is generally characterized by the following, as already mentioned in the section dealing with challenges, change dynamics and relationships issues:

- Mutual respect and trust;
- Shared decision-making;
- Shared goals and values;
- Common vision;
- Open communication;
- Good teamwork;
- Promotion of interest of partnership rather than of individual;
- Respect for roles and responsibilities of different partners. (*South African Schools Act*)

Above all the objective of participatory government in schools is to produce more effective schools rather than providing fulfillment for those who govern them (Sallis,1987).

The experience of the British and Welsh may shed light on the South African population in pioneering and championing our education reform. School governing bodies and school principals may learn a lot from this experience. Problems experienced by the Welsh and British may be avoided by joint co-operation and commitment to the ideas of the new policy.

In doing so the principal as a school governing body member is/should be allowed to participate in governance matters but may not vote. According to the Act, the school principal may also not occupy any executive position within the SGB. Irrespective of all these limitations the school principal is still a “valued participant” due to the advisory, guidance role as s/he has to play within the SGB and the life of the school in general.

Secondly, in terms of *South African Schools Act*, Section 19(2d)- “The Head of the Department must ensure that school principals and other officers of the education department render all necessary assistance to school governing bodies in the performance of their functions”. This implies that school principals should empower their SGB’s by acting as guides, providers of quality information, and facilitators of change rather than as bosses. As Prestine (1991), puts it “This assistance should be grounded not so much on line authority but must be based on mutual respect and equality of contribution and commitment. This will boost the confidence and capacity of the SGB’s and also assist them to make quality and well-informed decisions”.

However, the role of school principals and SGB’s need to complement each other. It is thus essential that both parties support each other in their endeavour to improve the quality in their schools. This partnership may only be attained if they support one another. The school principal as a “valued participant” is expected to play a leading role in cultivating a network of relationships.

Prestine (1991) further summed up this specific role of the principal in the following way: “The school principal is the key player in developing this network of relationships that allow restructuring schools to weather the inevitable storms they will face”. Finally s/he should lead and advise the SGB in the task prescribed by the Constitution to help transform the South African society by adhering to and complying with the following constitutional principles and values which must always be taken into account in the governance of schools, namely;

- Respect for human dignity, the achievement of equality and the advancement of human rights and freedoms;
- non-sexism;
- the rule of law;
- the principle that all adults must be able to vote and there must be regular elections, a multi party system of democratic government, accountability and openness (*South African Schools Act*).

This reallocation of the roles and responsibilities constituted a major shift in the practices of the past. As such, the legacy of the past may be eliminated by re-inventing the culture of co-operation, collaboration, democratic decision-making and political accountability.

2.3.3 FEMINIST THEORIES

In this section I interrogate the ways issues of gender and subjectivities are addressed, as informed by feminist theories, namely radical and socialist feminist theories. The two feminist theories are described and expounded to illustrate the relevant features that enabled me to analyze the data collected from the three participants. I explore how these two theories can help to understand the historical, social and cultural practices which constitute and contest gender relations in my study which explores gender as the central determinant of identity construction of the three African women principals.

2.3.3.1 RADICAL FEMINIST THEORY

This theory advocates the notion that women are subordinated to men and looks at patriarchy as the driving force for domination, exploitation and oppression of women by men (Hartmann 1997, Walby 1995). Patriarchal power rests on the social meaning given to biological sexual differences between men and women (Weedon 1997:2).

In patriarchal discourse, the nature and social role of women are defined in relation to a norm that is male. The fact that women are seen as biologically weak, as compared to men, makes them seen as 'other'. "This finds its clearest expression in the generic use of the terms 'man' and 'he' to encompass all humankind" (Weedon 1997:2). Radical feminists argue for the condition that recognises both the uniqueness and separateness of women and recognition of their worth as being equal to that of men. As Kate puts it:

"In the labour force, men maintain their control over women by excluding them from positions of power and authority. They do this by occupying positions of power which enables them to dominate in decision-making processes. This automatically gives them power over women. This fact is evident at once if one recalls that the military, industry, technology in short, every avenue of power within the society is entirely in male hands" (Kate 1971:25).

Male domination also makes men unite in their dominance over women by forming male networks that will make women economically dependent on them. As Hartmann puts it: "A set of social relations between men, which have a material base and which through hierarchical, establish or create interdependence and solidarity among men that enable them to dominate women" (1997:101).

Radical feminism pays attention to women's oppression in a social order dominated by men. This notion of shared oppression is intimately connected to a strong emphasis on the sisterhood of women. One of the basic tenets of radical feminism is that any woman

has more in common with any other woman regardless of class, race or ethnic group, than any woman has with a man.

In radical feminism as a political necessity, the views on women are as follows:

- Women are subordinate to men
- Women are subject to patriarchal societies
- Women are made to be economically dependent on men
- Women are biologically weaker than men
- Women share a sisterhood due to their similar experiences

For the purpose of this study, I appropriate the idea of patriarchy as a systematic domination of men over women. Unlike the positioning of women as victims of male oppression in radical feminism, the study looks at modes of self-definition and how these shape the leadership styles and attitudes of the three selected African women school principals.

2.3.3.2 SOCIALIST FEMINIST THEORY

This theory addresses the issue of social class and gender. Its writers use the reproductive theory, which focuses on the provision of cheap labour for a capitalist social structure to explain existing gender inequalities.

For the understanding of gender relations, social feminists find significance in class relations and the exploitive economic relations between classes. They see these relations as oppressive to women. So much so that woman's liberation from the family cannot be achieved outside society.

According to Hartmann (1997), and Walby (1992), the socialist feminist analysis of women's positions takes three forms:

- The first position questions women in the economic system. Women are defined as part of the working class thus subsuming women's relation to men as workers and producing workers
- The second sees all aspects of women's lives as those that reproduce the capitalist system
- The third position focuses on women as house workers

All three forms classify women in the category of working class but the latter two emphasise house work to a large extent and ignore women's current role in the labour market.

Not only roles are assigned by society, but their value is defined as well. Within the African culture, the feminine role remains subordinate to the masculine role. Men are still regarded as the "heads of families", even if the wives earn more than they do. Men are often seen as leaders and given more opportunities to lead than are women. Further, the work that men do is more highly regarded by society than is the work assigned to women.

Blackmore (1993) noted that the roles assigned to women, caring for families, keeping a home, and so on, have a low prestige in African culture. Jean Baker Miller (1986), agreed noting that "in our culture 'serving others' is for losers, it is low-level stuff, yet serving others is a basic principle around which women's lives are organized". Society teaches women to accept the role of supporting, taking care of and responding to others. Competing and succeeding in work life and public affairs is the primary role assigned to men, and high prestige is attached to that role.

Apart from the above mentioned approaches, Engels observed that the original division of labour was between men and women for the purposes of child-breeding. Within the

family, the husband was the owner, the wife the means of production and the children the labour. The reproduction of the human species was an important economic function distinct from the means of production (Firestone 1997).

Amos and Parmar (2001) assert that patriarchy is not about gender oppression but about power. A particular implication of this is that while all perspectives of social life are limited, some are limited more than others. Sandra Harding (1991) argues that those in positions of power have a vested interest in preserving their place in the hierarchy so their views of social life are more distorted than the views of persons who gain little or nothing from existing power relationships.

Another reason that those in groups labelled subordinate may have fuller understandings is that they have to understand both their own perspective and the viewpoints of persons who have more power. To survive, subjugated persons have to understand people with power, but the reverse is not true. From this it follows that women have unique insights into the nature and workings of a society.

To date, social theory has sought to harness what is perceived as two strands of women oppression:

- Class oppression,
- Capitalist oppression.

Thus socialist feminism says the following about women:

- Women are producers of cheap labour;
- Women are subject to capitalist oppression;
- Women are economically dependent on men;
- Women are the working class;
- Women are biologically suited to motherhood and housekeeping duties.

For purposes of this study, I deliberately foreground the issue of gender as the central determinant of identity construction. My focus is on how women are perceived by their colleagues and the members of the communities they serve.

2.4 CONCLUSION

In this chapter of literature review and theoretical framework, education leadership was explored in greater detail. For the school principal as a leader, it is important to return time and again to St Francis' prayer of seeking first to understand. Communication skills such as empathic listening, enables followers to feel understood. Relationships form the core of community. Without participatory leadership, the school's mission cannot be realised. The leader exists only because of the relationship attained with followers and that this relationship allows followers to assume leadership, and leaders in turn to become followers. Leaders in short, create other leaders and it is in this fashion that leadership becomes a shared and communal process.

It is only in relation to one another that the leader and follower test each other's integrity and authenticity. Foster contends that the authentic leader is critical of social arrangements and therefore enters into relationships with freedom from economic, racial, gender and ethnic oppression.

This chapter further explored the position of women in relation to the following situations:

- Firstly, our education department operates in a culturally heterogeneous country like South Africa with its Constitution and has policies including the *South African Schools Act*, and therefore cannot avoid a diverse workforce. It certainly makes sense to offer equal opportunity to everyone within the system, including schools. What matters is not whether, but how the department of education rethinks its human resources management policies.

- Secondly, diversity has to be recognised and valued. This is the essence of diversity, the freedom to be equally valued for the difference and the freedom to come together to create something more than anyone could have done alone.
- Thirdly, I try to respond to questions about the capacity of " others " including women themselves in relation to their position of leadership and their willingness.

Women of today have entered into a new era and this generation is different. If they have the right attitude and are passionate about what they do and want to do, and are flexible enough to cope, they will have a lot of fun in the new South Africa. The country has changed forever and what is in the melting pot is what it will become. Women of today and tomorrow will choose and create that future.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH DESIGN

3.1 INTRODUCTION

This research examines the professional life histories of three women school Principals. The focus is on their management experience as women, in relation to School Governing Bodies, School Management Teams and the school community at large. The central aim of this research is to present and understand the world of the informants as they perceive it. The views of the participants are considered to be most significant, as is the meaning they attribute to their experiences and context.

Data collection in this study relies on semi-structured, tape-recorded interviews with three African women school principals in the Ethekewini region. This occurs in two stages, the preliminary interview stage and in-depth interviews. Through these interviews the research study interrogates:

- The experiences of these African women school principals in relation to their management responsibilities
- The impact of their personal and professional experiences on their lives as women school principals.

The intention of using the qualitative approach in this research is to highlight gender and class experiences of the research participants in terms of their subjectivities and identities based on their cultural and social influences as women.

3.2 RATIONALE FOR THE APPROACH

Coming from an African background myself, I understand African women's values, norms, their emotions as well as their actions. I also share with them a frame of reference in which our feminine identity is grounded, a sense of group identity and affiliation, a sense of society and how to behave within it. That is why in my rationale I stated that "while the Constitution argues that women and men are equal partners in life, unequal treatment is meted out in the workplace. This stems from the conditioned behaviour pattern of women which results in them accepting their femaleness."

By interacting with these women Principals, I was able to explore and achieve a deeper understanding of their feelings, thoughts and the impact their experiences have in their lives as women principals. I also got an opportunity to understand how society treats them and how they cope.

It is important to note that my experiences as an African woman principal may and/or are likely to have lead to subjectivity in my role as a researcher.

3.3 METHODOLOGY

This study focused on the management experiences of three African women principals. Life history methodology was used because it allowed me access into the women's personal worlds and to gain a deeper understanding of their lived experiences. Data could best be captured in narratives. Statistical data would not impede the theoretical understandings of women but also leads to the creation and implementation of development plans that ignore and could even harm the interests of women (Fonow & Cook 1991).

Life history methodology used within the broader framework of a qualitative research methodology provided me with the research tool, namely personal interviews, to explore in depth the management experiences of the research participants. I strongly believe that

the use of qualitative research would best achieve my objective of exploring their experiences and analysing the data from an eclectic feminist theoretical framework (Jayaratne and Steward 1991).

Qualitative methodology possesses the elements for this study, as it is aimed at unpacking the individual management experiences of women school principals and not forming generalisations. It was only be through interviews that I was able to explore their experiences and the impact these experiences have in their lives. This meant that I must engage in a dialogue. This dialogue meant a series of interviews. I was able to empathise and sympathise with these women through this personal contact. Hence I chose human interaction, this could only be achieved through a qualitative approach.

Qualitative research has several distinguishing features (Vulliamy & Webb, 1992). Firstly, it provides descriptions and accounts of the processes of social interaction in natural settings. A 'natural' setting pertains directly to the normal, everyday life experiences as they occur. Through a combination of observation and interviews the researcher is allowed into the life world of the people under study. This is done in order for the researcher to understand people from their own perspectives.

Secondly, with the qualitative research method, culture, meanings and processes are emphasised, rather than variables, outcomes and products which are characteristic of quantitative methods. Qualitative attributes have labels or names rather than numbers, assigned to their respective categories. Any attribute measured in numbers can be referred to as quantitative. These numbers have the properties of the number system. Numbers can be added, subtracted, divided or multiplied before being quantified. With qualitative research however, the only numerical operation that may be conducted on qualitative variables is calculation of the frequency or percentage of each category (e.g. the percentage of persons with red hair). Other familiar examples of qualitative classifications are those that use number designations as social security numbers and telephone numbers. The research is primarily concerned with the process whereby

certain behaviour is realised rather than merely the outcomes of behaviour, although this is considered to be important as well.

Thirdly, when compared with quantitative research, which revolves around the testing of preconceived hypotheses, qualitative research aims to generate hypothesis and theories from the data that emerge. This occurs in an attempt to avoid the imposition of a previous frame of reference on the subjects of research, (Vulliamy & Webb, 1992). By not having a preconceived hypothesis, it allowed me to have far greater flexibility concerning research design, data collection and analysis.

3.4 SAMPLING

The target population for this study comprises all African women school principals in KwaZulu Natal. The central aim of this study is not to compare women and men but to relate stories and experiences of the research participants in relation to their management experiences.

The sample for the research consists of three participants from the Ethekewini Region. The sample was chosen as follows:

- The participants were purposefully selected to reflect an urban, semi-urban and rural settings
- The participants are of the same race. Although gender and race are inextricably interwoven in the experiences of women, I want to explore the nature of gender experiences of women from the same race.
- The participants are qualified and permanent principals employed by the KZN Department of Education and Culture;
- The participants' schools were under the ex- Department of Education and Training;
- The participants have at least two years of management experience as principals;
- The participants are principals of functional schools; and
- The participants are wives and mothers.

These "homogeneous" characteristics do not mean that the stories will be constant and common. I know from my experience that commonalities and differences do exist regardless of how homogeneous we are.

These women are already in positions of leadership as principals and the positions of these women were the 'result' of a policy of gender equality as professed by the Department of National Education in its promotions policy documents. The fact that these women are principals of varying ages and number of years of experience, and at different stages of family and professional life, would in my view, create an interesting picture of research participants in terms of their gender and class experiences in their personal and professional spheres.

Each research participant in this study was given a pseudonym in response to the promise of confidentiality. The names used in this study are not intended to label any of these women.

3.5 DATA COLLECTION

Data was collected by means of semi-structured interviews. Interviews can be structured differently. Grebenik and Moser (1962) see the alternative types of interviews as ranging somewhere along what they call 'a continuum of formality':

At one end is the completely formalized interview where the interviewer behaves as much like a guide as possible. At the other extreme is the completely informal interview in which the shape is determined by individual respondents; cited in Bell (1993).

In a completely formalized interview, the interviewer asks questions in exactly the same way the questions are worded. These questions must follow a set order for all the respondents interviewed. The interviewer must not in any way lead the interviewee on

by expressing an opinion or further clarifying any of the questions asked. The more standardized and formalized the interview, the easier it is for the interviewer to quantify the results.

My choice of the semi-structured interviews was based on the premise that they will allow me:

- To enter the interview with a general idea of where the interview will go, rather than with a list of pre-determined questions i.e. topics and issues rather than questions to determine the course of the interview (Nunan 1992);
- To explain the purpose of the study in an explicit way;
To clarify the information immediately and later on with the research participants;
- To stimulate the research participants with the aim to provide insights into their management experiences by means of a dialogue which will mean sharing my own personal experiences;
- To seek further clarity on some of the responses that participants gave to questions;

As Kitwood (cited in Cohen and Manion, 1991), asserts:

“...in an interpersonal encounter people are more likely to disclose aspects of themselves, their thoughts, their feelings and values than they would in a less human situation. At least for some purposes, it is necessary to generate a kind of conversation in which the ‘respondent’ feels at ease. In other words, the distinctively human element in the interview is necessary to its validity...”

Gordon (1998) suggests that it is advisable to use this type of interviews if the researcher knows what he/she wants to know but still wants to leave some room for exploration as the interview proceeds. Corbin (1971) notes that questions in such an interview merely

indicate the kinds of topics or themes that might be covered rather than the actual questions that will be used.

3.6 ISSUES TO BE RESEARCHED

Central to this research is the spotlight focused on the principal as the leader and manager of her school. As the head of the school, the principal is directly responsible for leadership and is held accountable for all matters concerning the school.

In this respect, the study is intended to:

- Establish the extent to which the participating principals have moved from the more autocratic, rule bound approaches which the previous government favoured, to more democratic, accountable and equitable forms of leadership;
- Determine the degree to which the school principal, the SMT and SGB are doing to promote high standards of learning and teaching at schools;
- Determine whether their schools have sustained the visions and the missions.
- Establish the extent to which leadership and management capacity is developed in all members of the school community.
- Assess the balance between the needs of the school and that of the community.

In order to address the issues mentioned above, the following themes were used to elicit responses:

- Their birth place and family origin;
- The values that were passed on to them when they were growing up;
- What made them choose teaching as a career;

- What made them aspire to attain the positions they are currently occupying;
- Their relationships with SGBs and SMTs;
- How they would describe these relationships;
- The extent to which these relationships are influenced by gender;
- The values they would not want to compromise;
- Their coping strategies as women managers/principals;
- What they have learnt from their experiences as women principals;
- How they handle challenges;
- How they see themselves now as opposed to when they were class teachers.

3.7 GAINING ACCESS

After acquiring the participant's contact details, the study began with the researcher making appointments to see the research participants individually. This was influenced by the accessibility and availability of the interviewees. Individual interviews were conducted informally at a range of convenient places and times. Once I met with the interviewees, I began by introducing myself formally and expressed my interest in their management experiences as a manager myself.

I then handed over the letter written on my behalf by the former University of Durban Westville stating the intention of my study. Due to the informal nature of the interviews, each participant was interviewed three times and each interview lasted for two to three hours. The sessions were structured as follows:

- The first session covered biographical details
- The second session looked primarily for the highlights of the participant's lives, while still trying to have them include something from each stage of their lives
- The third session comprised a follow-up on outstanding issues

Every attempt was made to make the interviewees feel comfortable and at ease. All interviewees were assured of anonymity and the confidentiality of the information they

provide. Data was collected by recording the information with pen and paper in conjunction with a tape recorder though this might have caused tension or proved intimidating.

3.8 INTERPRETING THE INTERVIEW

There are two major steps in this phase of the process. Firstly I transcribed and then interpreted the taped interviews according to my predetermined objectives and analytical framework:

3.8.1 TRANSCRIPTION

I began the post-interview phase by familiarizing myself with the tapes and making a written summary of the content of each side of the tapes I have used. Thereafter, I used the approach used at the centre for the study of lives which is to tell the life stories of my participants in their own words from what they have already said in the tape, using the following guidelines:

- Clarity;
- Completeness; and
- Conciseness.

I also kept intact the language usage and every other verbal idiosyncrasy. For easy readability, I added a word or phrase if an answer to the question was incomplete and deleted any extraneous or unnecessary words or phrases. Because the idea was to end up with a flowing narrative in the words of my participants, I skipped over my questions and comments and only transcribed their words by putting these in typical sentence and paragraph form. As a courtesy, I offered the transcript to my participants in order for them to verify the contents.

3.8.2. INTERPRETATION

What I have done here was to validate the story itself and to explain the meaning of the story. This was an ongoing process which took place throughout the planning and the interpreting phases of my interviews with the participants.

3.9 ETHICAL MEASURES

As said earlier on, pseudonyms were used to ensure anonymity of the three respondents. An ethical clearance certificate was requested from the University of KwaZulu-Natal and this is appended in the final report.

3.10 TRIANGULATION AND VALIDITY

Triangulation, according to Denzin and Lincoln (1994), is not only a tool or strategy of validation, but also an alternative to triangulation. With the qualitative method, Tricker (cited in Vulliamy and Webb, 1992) argues that triangulation allows for evidence from different sources to be examined, compared and cross-checked. Tricker claims:

“the great the number of viewpoints on the same issue, the greater the chance of its validationDifferences in interpretation and disagreements about what happened are inevitable when many participants have a different role to play in the same action” (cited in Vulliamy and Webb, 1992).

The divergent viewpoints involving the same issue will serve as a cross-referencing device in the data analysis process. The differences in interpretation and the disagreements only served to broaden and highlight the understanding of the inter-relationships between the method used and data collected. All the contrasting accounts were finally produced as full and as balanced a picture as possible.

Other strategies of ensuring validity were:

- Biographical details were checked against reliable records such as Identity Documents and academic certificates.
- Informants were asked to check the transcribed interviews for any obvious errors, omissions or misrepresentations.
- An attempt was made to strike a balance between objective, verifiable facts and subjective interpretations.

3.11 THE RESEARCHER AS AN INSTRUMENT

As the intention of this study is to elicit personal narratives of the experiences of three African women principals, the open-ended questions and the semi-structured guidelines made the interview a malleable tool. It possessed qualities of flexibility, adaptability and were probing, which are valuable devices used to acquire a holistic and accurate account of the lived experiences of the research participants.

Traditional techniques warn the researcher not to become involved in the answers of the respondents. As the research intended for this study is for personal reasons, I did not heed this warning. My identity as an African woman principal enabled me to contest this traditional manner and wanted to engage in a dialogue. My participation in the interview, my listening, my attention and my immersion in this dialogue – interviewing mode, created a perception of sharing resulting in trust and openness in the disclosures. It allowed for honesty and a greater degree of freedom for the participants to express their feelings. This also created a context of closeness, thus minimizing the status of the researcher in terms of traditional hierarchical interviewing technique. I was one of them, as I too have gendered experiences as an African woman Principal. My engagement in this dialogical process also enabled me to understand their responses and not judge them.

3.12 CONCLUSION

This chapter analyzed the methodological approach used in the study. The size, characteristics and reason for the sample was described. A rationale for the research tool was given and the purpose and content of the interviews was described. The procedure to interpret data was also described. The next chapter describes the data gathered and findings arising from the analysis. The chapter will begin with a brief background of each participant and thereafter stories will be told in the words of the three research participants.

CHAPTER FOUR

ANALYSIS OF THE DATA

4.1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter explores the professional life histories of three African women school principals in the Ethekekwini region. The chapter offers a critical evaluation of their professional life histories, focusing mainly on their management styles and the ways in which these are shaped by gender relations. Life history methodology has been used within the broader framework of the qualitative research methodology as it provided me with the research tool, namely personal interviews, to explore and unpack in depth the individual management experiences of the three research participants and also to highlight gender in terms of the participants subjectivities and identities based on their cultural and social influences as African women.

Each participant's story is told in her own words. The aim of doing so is to provide a fairly authentic and relatively unmediated account of each participant's life history. This is done by essentially leaving out any questions and comments and transcribing only their words, putting these in typical sentence and paragraph form to keep common subject matter and resulting in a flowing narrative. To understand the experiences of the research participants, the following themes are used and analysed according to feminist theories. The themes are:

- Their styles of leadership;
- Their relationships with SGBs and SMTs;
- The extent to which these relationships are influenced by gender;
- The values that shape their leadership styles;
- Their coping strategies as women managers;
- What they have learnt from their experiences as women principals; and
- How they construct their professional identities.

Before presenting the life histories of each research participant in their own words, a brief descriptive biographical introduction to each participant's background is given in terms of the following:

- Childhood upbringing;
- Social environment where the informant grew up;
- Education; and
- Family life.

Significantly, the biographical details of each participant form part of the data in this study mainly because the 'private' sphere of family life and upbringing will be shown to have a direct relevance on the participants' public and professional identities as managers.

4.2 PRINCIPAL A (SUNSHINE)

4.2.1 BACKGROUND

Principal A was born in the mid-1960's at Umlazi Township, South of Durban. She comes from a close knit and very religious family. Both her mother and father were working when she was growing up. She is the last born of 7 siblings and has 3 brothers and 3 sisters.

She did her lower primary schooling at a local lower primary school and proceeded to another local senior primary school to do her senior primary education and did her senior secondary schooling at a local high school. All these schools are located in a black township known as Umlazi Township. She completed her Grade 12 at Lamontville High School. She then went to Appelsboch Training College to obtain her teaching diploma.

The social environment where Sunshine grew up consisted of mainly low-income earners living in four-roomed houses. Like other South African black townships, Umlazi is predominantly working class. The company her father was working for was closed down and left him without any income. By 1971 her mother was a successful entrepreneur driving as far as Ingwavuma and Jozini to sell clothes she sewed and always coming back with enough money to keep the home fires burning.

Sunshine is married to a government employee and they have three children; 1 boy and 2 girls. The husband is a Deputy Assistant Director of the Department of Finance, Durban. It is significant that her husband is a manager as well.

Sunshine started teaching in 1985 at the same primary school that she currently heading. She was a Level 1 educator until her principal retired in 1999. When a principalship post was advertised after 14 years, she applied and was appointed in the same year.

In 1989 she did a Remedial Education Diploma with the University of Durban Westville and thereafter did a Bachelor of Arts Degree at the same institution. She is currently enrolled with the University of South Africa for a Human Resource Management Diploma which she thinks will improve her management skills in terms of managing the educators with whom she is currently working.

Sunshine did not have her mind set on teaching from an early age. Whilst waiting for an acceptance letter from the University where she had applied to do a Bachelor of Social Work degree, an opportunity presented itself and she seized it. Her change of career choice also met no resistance from her parents.

4.2.2 SUNSHINE'S STORY IN HER OWN WORDS

I've been a Principal for five years now; this is really amazing since I never thought that I would one day be a Principal. What started off as a 'mistake' is what I now enjoy doing. I didn't really expect things to turn out this way. It all started off when I finished Grade 12

and was still waiting for an acceptance letter to the University where I had applied to study for a Bachelor of Social Work Degree. Being the youngest of 7 siblings, my life was always steered by either my parents, my brothers or my sisters. When my eldest sister went to Appelsboch College of Education for the first time, I followed her example. Being a curious person by nature, I ended up asking the administrators at the college if there was still any room for students interested in enrolling for the course and to my surprise I got a big yes. That is when I took a decision to try teaching over my dream of becoming a social worker. Fortunately my change of mind met no resistance from my parents.

The following day my family was back at the college, this time to enrol me. It was very exciting to be in the very same institution as my elder sister because we come from a very close knit family. After completing my studies, I started teaching in 1985 at the very same primary school I'm currently heading.

Fifteen years down the line, I did not think I was ready to become a Principal since I was a Post level 1 educator, but when my then Principal retired, we were all invited to apply for the post. I seized the opportunity. With my high self esteem, attributable to being brought up by the kind of mother I have, who always encouraged us to aim for the stars and be the best we could, I knew I was going to make it. For your information, I submitted my application on the closing date and here I am today a beaming Principal of a growing school. At the time the school had a male Deputy Principal and three Heads of Departments.

After my appointment, I received no support from my colleagues, I guess it was because most of them had also applied for the post but were unsuccessful. Fortunately my husband, who is also a manager, gave me a lot of support and motivation. This motivated me to work twice as hard to prove myself and to read a lot. I also gained a lot from the induction workshop that I attended in 1999 soon after my promotion to principalship. This workshop was offered by the KZN Department of Education and Culture and it covered the following areas:

- Leadership in a Self Reliant school
- Human resources management
- School development planning and policies
- Managing the curriculum (instructional leadership)

As a married person, I do not have a problem in terms of balancing work and my family life. My former Principal used to say: “ When I get out of the school gate, I leave the school’s problems and lock them up with the school”. I do the same although I must admit that it was difficult in the beginning. Likewise when I enter the school gate, I leave my personal life behind me, but I must confess it took a while for me to learn to do this.

I have made sacrifices since I took the position, firstly my patience because educators can sometimes be very rude and ones patience therefore gets tested. I have also sacrificed the privilege of being first. I ensure that I put my interests last and those of the learners, educators and parents first. I also sacrifice my personal security for the sake of the co-operation of the whole group. The one thing I have and will never sacrifice is my will to fight the fact that there will always be people who will always enjoy seeing me struggling and my efforts failing because I am a woman.

Fortunately I don’t see gender as a constraint. Instead to me it is a positive factor because as a woman and a mother I’m used to managing, so whatever I do emanates from my domestic management style. I know men always look at me as a woman and not a manager and women see me as a ‘bitch’, but that makes me hold my head even higher up because I know all that has absolutely nothing to do with my management style. I guess I owe this to my mother who has a very strong character and is also very diligent. She challenged gender-related stereotypes by being an entrepreneur back in the 1970s.

The Christian values that were passed on to me when I was growing up also help me a lot because when things do not turn out the way I want them to, I am able to accept them instead of worrying over them. My being a religious person has helped me in first seek to

understand people or situations rather than being understood. These are the values I would not compromise.

After taking over this post back in 1999, things were very difficult at first especially because I was part of them and to make matters even worse, I used to be managed by some of the people whom I was now going to manage. To make things even worse, we all competed for the very same post and armed with good credentials, I was lucky enough to get it. All hell broke loose. The question was “She thinks she is clever, well we will see how she is going to do it”. I told myself that I am good, winners don’t quit and quitters don’t win, I will persist not for the sake of doing things but to prove that my appointment was not a mistake.

I used to see my ex-principal who was female, viewed by the SMT as a representative of the female gender rather than perceived as an individual. She had her job performance scrutinised more and was highly visible for the wrong reasons and to make matters worse, she encountered hostility from male colleagues, hence she retired before time. I also received the very same treatment at first and I told myself that I was going to break this.

We are gradually working towards a steady relationship with the SMT although there is still one member who really fails to accept me as a woman Principal and always instigates actions by the staff against me. For example, in the staff meetings, after having discussed issues as the SMT, he starts asking questions he did not ask in the meeting. I just feel he wants to expose me. I am gradually overcoming this but I must say, it is tough because he even tries to infiltrate the School Governing Body, but so far he has failed. With other members of the staff we have a good working relationship as colleagues-cum-subordinates.

With regard to the staff in general, besides the SMT, at first they pretended as if they accept me because no one wanted to be seen as the ‘jealous one’. As time went on utterances which were aimed at undermining my decisions and at testing how firm I am,

began to emerge. I have stood steadfastly and have shown a high level of assertiveness to them while avoiding confrontation and fighting. Today they know where I draw the line and they respect me very much as I do respect them.

Since my school is in an urban area, the community nominated both men and women to represent them in the School Governing Body. All the members are literate, with their education ranging from Std 8 upwards, which makes working with them easy. Everyone has respect for another's point of view and no one looks down upon another simply because he feels he is biologically superior to another.

I guess another contributing factor to the smooth relationship with the School Governing Body is the fact that I display a lot of confidence and outstanding qualities which I think have earned me the respect of both the male and the female members. This has even permeated to the community as they are allowed access to make use of the school's computer centre and they also use the school for church purposes. This has resulted in a decrease in the number of the burglaries the school used to experience. The community feel that they own the school.

My coping strategies in dealing with negativity from the word go was to adopt a half-democratic and half-autocratic style of leadership. My husband has always been a pillar of strength. From him I have learnt amongst other things:

- How to manage without emotions
- How to rise above criticism and grow from it,
- How to avoid confrontation.

My being a firm and assertive person also helps me because I do not tolerate rudeness and defiance as a principal. If we do not see eye to eye on a personal level that is fine with me but when it comes to work related matters a no is a no.

I also bring out the best in my educators by acknowledging and commending good work and if I know that a teacher is good at something, I give that particular teacher the opportunity to shine and also give support every step of the way. To such an extent it has resulted in me being seen as a role model to some because they do express verbally how they look up to me and how they appreciate working with me. This has also motivated me to become an even better person because now I'm no longer just a school principal, I am a social worker, a psychologist, a nurse and a teacher at the same time.

My experiences in relation to the School Governing Body, the School Management Team and the staff has taught me that the success of the school depends to a large extent upon the ability of the school principal to take the lead. But for the principal to execute her duties to the best of her ability, she needs to be totally accepted by everyone in the school. I personally need everyone around me to help me achieve the goals of the school.

I am aware of the potential of each member and have learnt to point these out. I also entrust responsibility to willing members of staff and make sure that the success of the assigned task is a collective effort. I am prepared to use my character to produce a harmonious relationship especially with my school management team so that it automatically permeates to the staff. In achieving this let me use the example of a good conductor who wants to produce perfect harmony amongst the different 'singers and instruments'. Only once this has been achieved will I be able to create magnificent music.

4.2.3 A THEMATIC ANALYSIS OF SUNSHINE'S STORY

4.2.3.1 GENDER

Since the school is in an urban area, it is not strange for the society to have nominated both men and women to represent them in the School Governing Body. All of them are literate which makes it easy for them to work as a team. Everyone has respect for another's point of view and no one looks down upon another simply because he feels he is biologically superior to another. Another contributing factor towards her smooth

relationship with the SGB is that she displays a lot of confidence and has outstanding qualities as a leader which has earned her the respect of both male and female SGB members.

Whilst feminist theorists argue that women experience more complexities in career experiences because of the effects of early sex-role socialisation, when they learn which roles are important and which ones are not for women, this is not the case with Sunshine.

As Stanley and Wise point out the fact that:

“consciousness is not simply the act of interpreting but also of constructing the social world. Women seem to share a condition of familiar ‘embeddedness’ that is central to the way they experience and construct their social world” (1981).

The critical feminists’ question regarding consciousness as an act of social construction is whether and under what conditions such embeddedness is neither internalised and taken for granted nor seen as problematic and questionable. As long as a woman falls within the boundaries of this embeddedness, she will experience interference from the opposite sex. It is evident that Sunshine neither displays this embeddedness nor is her relationship with SGB affected by it.

With democracy in South Africa came affirmative action. My participant used to see her ex-principal, who was a female, viewed by the SMT as representative of gender rather than being perceived as an individual. She had her job performance scrutinised more and was highly visible for the wrong reasons, and to make matters worse, she encountered hostility from male colleagues and as a result retired early. She wanted to put a stop to this.

Women always find themselves in an intense battle be it within the home, society or at work. Their biological construction makes men treat them as “other”. Radical feminist theorists concur with this as they state that women are subject to patriarchal societies.

Men want to maintain their control over women by either shutting away or excluding them from positions of power and authority. They are good at uniting by forming networks that will make women dependent on them. Sunshine's experiences with her husband whom she sees as the pillar of strength and her relationship with the SGB show a very clear deviation from this statement and the preceding one.

Sara Delamont's (1989) findings that the person's background has got everything to do with how one constructs herself is true of my participants. She seems to imitate her mother's strong character. In her story, my participant made mention of the fact that one SMT member who happens to be a male, tries to expose her in staff meetings and to address the above, she plans every meeting with the SMT. She pre-empts all the issues that will have to be discussed and tells them what she expects from them.

4.2.3.2 LEADERSHIP

Before delving deeper into the debates around the question of leadership, it is necessary to briefly outline the theoretical knowledge base for this concept. Walker (In Duignan and Macpherson, 1992) points out that leaders in education are frequently under pressure, whether in the school or other parts of the education system. Walker stressed that leadership in education should contribute understanding of respect for genuine differences and opinions of those involved in the process.

The concept of leadership is inextricable from the concept of management. The two concepts are inter-linked and inter-dependent. The two factors hold together and develop all other aspects (Donald *et al*, 1997:91). Management is defined as the art of getting things done through other people in the organisation (Rees, 1991:1). It is, as Henry Fayol perceives it (in Rees, p1) the forecasting and planning, organising and co-ordination of organisational activities. Leadership could be viewed as being rightfully in a position to lead, motivate, influence, and at the same time be willing to be influenced by those with whom you are working. To be a leader in a modern sense of the word means to be able

to sustain pressure and demonstrate willingness to work with others in a systematic, supportive and a healthy way.

According to Donald *et al* (1997), leadership is the art of doing the right thing at the right time. In a school context, leadership is primarily concerned with giving a direction, sustaining the vision and mission of the school and inspiring without dominating members of the organisation. While on the other hand, management is about restructuring and ensuring that all set goals, objectives, visions and missions are successfully achieved.

Donald *et al*, (1997) reveal that an effective school is the one in which leadership and management capacity is developed in all members of the school community. This is likely to happen effectively if there is an ongoing personal and professional development process and structured support from within. School effectiveness cannot be achieved if leadership is perceived to be the concern of one person in the organisation. School leadership and management is a collective responsibility, though there is a need for one person to direct and guide the group.

Ken Melrose (cited in Spears, 1998: 295) believes that leadership is not a person. It is a combination of skills and competence that one shows and uses to enable others to learn and make progress towards mutual goals. Melrose concludes that when a leader creates an environment conducive to personal growth, people rise to their potential and beyond.

This framework is vital in a sense that it raises a lot of issues that seem to be ignored when dealing with the question of leading to improve the quality of education. Leaders, in a school context, must work towards taking the trouble to critically analyse their situation very carefully, clarify their own values and views of knowledge and learning, and try to understand the problems of others in education (Walker, in Duignan and Macpherson, 1992: 47). This implies that a leader in education is said to be an analyst in education situation. And as Walker puts it, an educative leader is an evaluator of merits

of a variety of often conflicting and contentious viewpoints, and a confident decision-maker.

As schools became more democratic, the issue of leadership grew more complicated, which has resulted in most principals not knowing which leadership style to adopt.

Sunshine has adopted a half-democratic and half-autocratic style of leadership to cope with different situations. This is especially on those occasions when she knows there is likely to be agreement or disagreement.

In contrast to the radical and socialist feminist discourses, Sunshine does not view her family as an instrument of oppression. Instead her husband, who has worked as a human resource manager, has been her pillar of strength. She sees him as a driving force behind her career.

According to Skevington and Buker (1989), women define themselves in terms of their husband's occupation and position. In devoting their efforts to improving his social status, they also enhance their own image. Significantly, Sunshine does not see her career as secondary. Her husband's career occupies the same status as hers. She is able to afford her family responsibilities the same priority as her career.

While socialist feminist theory considers the family to be central to women's lives and to the determination of gender inequality, and radical feminist theory sees gender and production in the household as exploitation by husbands (Walby 1992), both theories agree on the role of women in the household to be subordinate to the domination of men.

I personally see Sunshine as a dynamic, creative and adventurous person who likes to introduce many changes. She can be persuasive and has high levels of drive and energy. Like the 'boss' she has a realistic view of the school but demands less loyalty.

Her management practices are reflected in the human rights principles that she has implemented in her school. She is aware of the fact that it is no longer good enough for school principals to be good administrators; they must be proactive leaders and managers. Good management requires qualities of leadership and good leadership requires qualities of management. Without doubt leadership and management go together and she has both qualities.

4.2.3.3 SCHOOL GOVERNANCE

Through experiences in relation to the School Governing Body and the School Management Team, Sunshine has learnt that the success of the school depends to a large extent upon the ability of the school principal to take the lead. But for the principal to execute her duties to the best of her ability, she needs to be totally accepted as the principal by the entire school community. The Principal needs people around her, especially the School Governing Body and the School Management to help her achieve the goals of the school.

4.3 PRINCIPAL B (BURNING LIGHT)

4.3.1 BACKGROUND

Principal B was born in Pietermaritzburg. Both of her parents were labourers and they had 12 children, 5 girls and 7 boys. She is the eldest in the family and used to look after her siblings when her parents were at work. That is when she grew fond of children, which resulted in her choosing teaching as a career.

She did her primary schooling locally at Langspruit and proceeded to Sacred Heart to do her secondary education. Both schools are in Pietermaritzburg. She then went to St Francis College to obtain her teacher's certificate. Her father died whilst she was writing her final examination, an experience she will never forget as she had the pressure of honouring her

father's wish of becoming a teacher in spite of the pain she was feeling at the time. This does not mean that she did not have her mind set on teaching though.

The social environment where Burning Light grew up consisted mainly of typical working-class people. Most families were struggling, but because most of them were in the same situation they did not feel the pinch as much. The area in which the participant grew up had a church school run by Roman Catholic nuns, some of whom helped to shape her life in many ways and at one stage she thought of becoming a nun, but her love for children made her to think otherwise.

She did not get married soon after completing her studies as she had to look after her siblings and make sure that they also received almost the same education she got. She was the one in charge of paying for school fees as well as buying them school uniforms.

After meeting her husband in 1968 and getting married, she had to resign from teaching to bear children as it was government policy at the time. During this time she bore 3 girls. Her husband was working for the Natal Provincial Administration. He used to take care of his family financially. His drinking habits created instability in the family as he used to shout and scream at them, particularly on weekends when he was not working. Not even his extended family could control him. He died in 1982.

In 1975, after staying at home for six years, she went back to teaching in the same school that she is currently heading and was fortunate to work with the Dominican Sisters. She did her best and as a result, she got promoted in 1979 to a principalship post. At the time, the school was a private school. The status of the school changed in 1993 from being private to becoming a State-Aided school. Teachers began to get their salaries from the Department of Education and Training. Post 1994 the separate departments of education amalgamated into one Department of Education and Culture. This resulted in the merging of some of the schools. Her school merged with a nearby Indian school and that resulted in an increased number of staff. At the moment she has 33 teachers to manage from

different racial backgrounds, 10 Indians and 23 Africans 32 of which are females and only 1 male who is a Deputy Principal.

4.3.2 BURNING LIGHT'S STORY IN HER OWN WORDS

It feels like I've been in this profession my whole life. It's been over four decades now, twenty five years of which has been as the principal of the primary school that I'm currently heading. I have made sacrifices along the way though. I remember that I had to take a six year break so as to fulfil my role of being a wife. At the time you didn't have a choice, it was either your career or your marriage. I do not regret my choice as I would not be a proud mother of three girls, one of which has already made me a granny.

When I got back into the system, I did not choose to become a principal, I guess it was sheer luck coupled with hard work, because by then my school was a private school run by the Catholic Church through the nuns. It was work, work and work and the nuns did not expect less. I was fortunate that during my secondary schooling years and in training, I was taught by nuns so I was used to their way of doing things. I guess by doing what they expected, I landed myself a Head of Department post and two years down the line was appointed the principal of the school. Also my being a Catholic made things easy for me.

My responsibility amongst other things was to keep the distinctive religious character of the school, its aim being:

- To integrate faith and culture
- To promote holistic education
- To provide for social concerns and care for others

It was also my responsibility to make sure that this character is maintained in the following manner:

1. A RELIGIOUS DIMENSION TO THE SCHOOL

- Worship: prayer, religious assemblies, key events, feast days – all in accord with faith-life of the individual
- Solidarity with poor and disadvantaged: practising justice at school and training in response to local needs
- Critical reflection: evaluating its own life and opposing anything hostile to human dignity.

2. RELIGIOUS EDUCATION ACCORDING TO THE BROAD CATHOLIC APPROACH

- Ensures that religious principles permeate through all the activities of the school
- Is consistent with the religious education policy of the Catholic Bishops
- Embraces personal growth and moral formation
- Is rooted in Catholic tradition but accommodates other faiths
- Caters for specific needs of Catholics but respects religious freedom
- Gives a sound theory and practical basis for religious beliefs and practices

3. HARMONY WITH VALUES OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

Learners, parents and staff need to be aware of the nature of the school. While the right to freedom of religion and conscience is respected, undermining of the distinctive religious character by anybody concerned with the school is not acceptable.

As there is a convent next to my school, there is constant support from the nuns who sometimes bring visiting principals from abroad just to share ideas with us as they are keen to keep the good reputation of the school. Apart from that, I have other female principals with whom I network.

I also wish I still had the same Superintendent of Education that used to support me, from him I learned a lot. He was very patient and understood the circumstances I work under.

He gave me the courage to hold on and appreciated my efforts. I remember when there was racial tension at my school immediately after the merging of the two schools, he called an Imbizo and addressed the entire school community. You work best when you know your good efforts are acknowledged.

Since the school is in a rural setting, the society, in line with traditional value systems, expects men to play a leading role. Most of the SGB members are men, which makes it difficult to work with. The majority are not literate enough and they do not want to accept the fact that their role is to govern the school and not to interfere with the professional part of school management. To them, a person in charge should be a man.

I have encouraged them to attend governance workshops conducted in isiZulu but still their attitude towards women has never changed. They do not give me the full support I expect from them, instead they fight with me. The meetings never start on time, they come about an hour to about an hour and a half late and they do not see anything wrong with that. I have tried on several occasions to correct them but have not succeeded. I feel they don't respect me as I am a woman. My opinions at the meetings are not taken seriously. They talk anyhow and that has resulted in confrontations with other members who feel that, as men, their word needs to be final.

With regard to the SMT, there is no full co-operation from all members, for instance, sometimes when a SMT member is requested to represent me at the Principal's meeting, one refuses. As they have friends amongst the staff, I have noticed that there is no confidentiality. Matters discussed at an SMT meeting are known by the staff before they get formally notified of these matters. Delegation is resisted the HOD refers me to the deputy principal. They lack self confidence. For instance, if they are asked to address learners at the assembly or conduct a workshop for the educators, there will be a lot of argument.

Racism within the SMT also divides the management of the phases. The English speaking HOD who is an Indian does not want to manage the Zulu speaking educators. It

becomes very difficult to work under such circumstances. I expect full support from the SMT and for them not to be against me, especially when an instruction is given, and I also expect them to have a good influence and not to side with a group of educators.

I work well with most of the staff members, especially because they were all inducted by me. They are willing to conduct extra - curricular activities without being told to do so. There are also those who are not prepared to work. They steal teaching time and do their personal things. When there are meetings, they do not contribute. They also have no interest in the education of the learners. When the learner's books are checked, one discovers that wrong sentences are marked correct. They also encourage learners not to clean the school. They oppose everything and crush all the efforts made to uplift the school to expected standards because they want me to appear to be a failure.

In dealing with demands made by the people I've mentioned, I have adopted a strategy of going by the book. Most policies at my school are in place and if one transgresses, then I go by policy in terms of correcting that behaviour. It is definitely not like before the amalgamation of the schools when I used to correct them as my children and also they did not take anything I said to them personally because they trusted and respected me as their mother.

In spite of the problems I experience with some of the teachers, I've never lost hope in them. I still bring out the best in those willing and able teachers. I do this by encouraging them to upgrade themselves so that they can also be heads of institutions one day. I also delegate duties to them in order to prepare them, but I make sure that it is something that they are capable of doing because at the end of the day I am accountable.

So far what I encourage my teachers to do they are doing simply because I walk the talk. I myself am presently studying towards a B Ed Degree with RAU even if I'm already a school Principal. Some of them did mention the fact that I am a role model to them. The way in which I carry myself also makes some of them wish to be like me one day. Nowadays educators come to school in casual clothes. I always encourage mine to look

presentable like me, especially the lady teachers. I also remind them that they are role models to the learners they are teaching what the teachers do and say is copied by them.

In encouraging them to become better teachers, I do not lose myself along the way. I always keep ahead of them by attending workshops and seminars organised by the Department of Education and Culture. I also keep my eyes and ears open especially in matters relating to education so that when I'm asked something that relates to education by a teacher, I am able to give answers.

4.3.3 A THEMATIC ANALYSIS OF A BURNING LIGHT'S STORY

4.3.3.1 GENDER

While the beliefs and attitudes held by individuals can be influential, the general ethos and the institutional and organizational practises and customs of schools also have considerable impact on how individuals experience being female or male at school. (Measor & Sikes, 1992:116)

Since the school is in a rural setting, it is normal for the society to expect men to play a leading role, hence the domination of the school governing body by men. This may be easily understood by looking at radical feminist theory which states among other things that:

- women are subordinated to men; and
- women are subject to patriarchal societies.

Women find themselves in an intense battle with society. The assumption is that to be a woman is to be responsible for domestic labour. This is natural in terms of men's work and politics. Unfortunately reality dictates otherwise. Burning Light's plight is affirmed by Luke & Gore (1992) "women stand hip deep in cultures saturated with phallogocentric knowledges, in institutional structures ruled epistemologically and procedurally by men

and masculinist signifiers, and in a discipline which despite its historical terrain as “women’s work”, a caring profession, remains the theoretical and administrative custody of men”.

Amos and Parmar (2001), assert that patriarchy is not about gender oppression but about power. Although it is no longer believed that men are intellectually superior to women Archer & Lloyd (1992), it is still a widely held view that the two sexes think differently. Burning Light’s deputy is a male. Males are generally more competitive than females. The rationale for this is that men are also generally thought to be more achievement motivated than women are Bassow (1992). Radical feminists argue for the condition that recognises both the uniqueness and separateness of women and recognition of their worth as being equal to that of men.

Male domination makes men unite in their dominance over women by forming male networks. (Hartmann 1997: 101) concurs: “ A set of social relations between men which have a material base and which through hierarchy, establish or create interdependence and solidarity among men that enable them to dominate women”. Her experiences with the community include gender sensitive issues such as numerous recommendations by the community that since the school is headed by a woman it must have a male as a deputy and that it must also have more male staff since the community has no faith in a woman as a leader. This is attributed to the fact that the school is in a rural setting and, in general, societies in such areas hold men as figures of authority.

4.3.3.2 LEADERSHIP

The value of respect perceived by Burning Light as demanded by the African culture affects her leadership ability negatively because she never challenges her SGB if she is unhappy about certain attitudes or behaviours. Where attempts to challenge the SGB are made, these efforts are not made assertively. Respect as demanded by African culture is underpinned by a dual ideology:

- respect for elders; and
- respect for males.

Hill and Ragland (1995) assert that: “women are faced with internal barriers ranging from a lack of personal confidence to a fear of challenging the cultural expectations of their role.” Shakeshaft and Cohen (1990) seem to provide reason for Hill and Ragland’s argument. They base this erosion of self-esteem on the life-long effects of harassment and abuse in this case which is what Burning Light endured throughout her married life. Measor and Sikes (1992) concur that women in senior positions at schools do not provide examples of ‘success’, as they do not challenge traditional stereotypes. The message passed on is that it is normal for male authority to be enforced.

Burning Light’s humble background also has something to do with the way in which she still holds some traditional stereotypes. This seems to confirm Sara Delamont’s (1990) findings that teachers who come from lower-middle class backgrounds are most likely to hold traditional gender role stereotypes.

Feminists have argued that if women are generally less persistent, it is the result of their female socialization. They have other roles to fulfil first. This could result in lack of self-esteem and self confidence characteristics that give males an edge in the workplace.

While socialist feminist theory consider the society they live in to be central to women’s lives and to the determination of gender inequality and radical feminist theory sees gender as exploitation by males (Walby 1992), both theories agree to the role of women as being subordinate to the domination of men.

Burning Light has also come out strongly as being like a mother to her staff. This is attributed to the fact that she attended catholic schools which were run by nuns and who, because of the ethos of the catholic school, displayed this love that she in turn is showing to her staff. The motherly love that she displays to her staff does not prevent her from disciplining an educator if s/he happens to transgress. Policies adopted from the South

African Council of Educators, the Department of Education and Culture and those that were formulated by them at school are in place. If a teacher needs to be disciplined, she makes it a point that that unacceptable behaviour is corrected.

The policies she has in place are:

- Code of Conduct for Educators
- School Constitution
- Mission Statement
- Admissions Policy
- Language Policy
- Religious Policy

These policies do not only serve to instil or promote good discipline, but also to promote the following

- democracy;
- equality;
- human dignity;
- freedom; and
- justice.

4.3.3.3 SCHOOL GOVERNANCE

The relationship between Burning Light and her SGB is not a smooth one. There is a likelihood that this results from the fact that most members are men who believe that women should be subordinate to men. In addition, the SGB does not seem to know the difference between governance and management issues. They often meddle in the latter. This has led to little or no support to the principal by the SGB. Meetings always start late and little or no respect is shown to her during discussions.

4.4 PRINCIPAL C (SHINING STAR)

4.4.1 BACKGROUND

Shining Star was born in the mid 1950's at Umkhumbani, now known as Cato Manor. She grew up in KwaMashu. Her father was working as a labourer and her mother was a housewife. She is the eldest of 4 girls.

She did her primary as well as her secondary schooling in KwaMashu. When she was doing Substandard A, she was forced to drop out of school as her parents were moved to another area in KwaMashu and her father could not afford to pay for transport for her to continue schooling. She had to repeat Substandard A the following year. Her father passed on when she was doing Standard 5.

After obtaining her Junior Certificate (end of secondary education) she went to work as a domestic worker for one year to secure money for her studies. Her mother wanted her to become a nurse because at the time nurses earned money while training but she refused and opted to go and earn money for her studies at the teacher training college. She loved teaching and nothing could change her mind.

For the next two years she trained as a teacher at Amanzimtoti Teaching Training College where she obtained her Teachers' Certificate. She started teaching in 1974 as a privately paid teacher and in October of the same year got a permanent post in one of the ex-Education and Training Schools. She taught there for the next 10 years before getting a transfer in 1984 to the same school she is now heading in.

In 1991 she was appointed a Head of Department and put in charge of the same staff with whom she is currently working. She regarded her position as a token because the principal did not make use of her as an HOD. She was given an office and each time she wanted to do something, her principal would tell her that a certain male teacher would

take care of it. When the principal was not going to be at school, she used to inform the male teacher and everyone learned of her absence from him.

The social environment where my participant grew up was typical of a black South African township. At the time, the township was being developed and people from rural areas were flocking to look for greener pastures. Everybody lived in almost the same house as his/her neighbour. There were no recreational facilities and, as a result, she started a play-school when she was in Standard 2. The play-school used to start in the afternoon and would run until sunset and she taught boys and girls that were in standards lower than hers. She now remembers with pride that one of the girls that she taught at the play-school was placed in Substandard A for a couple of months and then promoted to Substandard B because she had already taught her everything a Substandard A child needed to know at the time.

In 1978, already with one daughter, she got married to a hardworking man who was very ambitious. As a result she did her matric through correspondence and completed it in 1982. She did not stop there, and continued on to do her Primary Teaching Diploma. She has recently got divorced from her husband after years of separation.

4.4.2 SHINING STAR'S STORY IN HER OWN WORDS

Growing up in a family like mine was not easy. I used to see my mother praying all the time and when we were old enough to understand, she instilled this value in us. Even when I was a teenager and things were really bad, prayer was an answer for me and God has never failed me. This value that was passed on to me when I was young is what I will not compromise. Respect is also what was inculcated in us. I remember my mother letting everyone who is an elder make use of us and at first we were angry with her until she told us that “your biological parents are not the only parents, anyone who is old enough to be your mother is your parent and you need to respect her”.

I guess it is because of my qualities that I am a school principal today. When we were playing school I remember that there were also children my age who wanted to teach and it was on my terms at what time they could start and whether they were fit enough to teach in my school. I guess unconsciously I wanted to become a principal one day. I made sure throughout my teaching career that I did my best and that my efforts were being recognised.

When I landed a Head of Department post, my wishes were confirmed. I worked even harder though my then principal didn't make use of me. That did not discourage me as that gave me more time to concentrate on the learners. I made sure that my class was always on top.

I'm getting a lot of support from other principals, females in particular because we talk the same language. Sometimes when you seek advice from a male colleague, you do not get the answers you want simply because we sometimes think differently. I also have a wonderful Superintendent of Education who, in spite of my being a pain to him at times, never fails me. It is like he was a woman in his previous life because he understands your point even before you think he understands what you are talking about. He is a real angel.

I must admit that being a single parent is not an easy thing especially when your children are teenagers. This sometimes makes me struggle to balance my professional and my personal life, but with the help of the people I have mentioned I do manage to pull through.

The sacrifices I have made are firstly not to devote as much time as I would like with my children especially because now I am the only parent they have. The other one which I always hope I did not make the mistake of making was my marriage. Before I became a principal, everything between me and my husband was okay. Problems started when I used to tell him that I have to attend to school matters even way after closing time that things began to sour. He would accuse me of being insensitive to his needs which I was

trying very hard to meet. This led to our divorce about a year and a half ago after a long separation.

I guess my getting separated from my husband made me a stronger person because I had to prove to my male counterparts that I know what I am doing and nothing is going to stop me even if it takes me working twice as much. To me gender is never a constraint, instead it motivates me. Though you cannot run away from the fact that males will always want to remind you that you are a woman and that makes you a lesser being than them.

As I am in the very same school where I was a post level 1 teacher, some of the teachers in my staff used to be my friends. They always commend me for being a hard worker and for how I inspire and motivate them. They really are looking up to me because I am a living proof that if you work hard, you definitely get rewarded one day. I also encourage them to be the best they can be.

As I mentioned earlier, the school I am heading now is the very same school I was a teacher at, but everything is not 'hunky dory'. There are people here and there who were not happy with my appointment and who have made it their job to try and make things difficult for me. For instance, there is not even a single SMT meeting that finishes on the correct note. Every time someone wants to prove a point, even if what is being discussed is simple and straightforward, someone will want to complicate things so that we do not go forward. I guess this is due to the fact that we all competed for the same position.

With regard to the staff, as I have said earlier on, most look up to me except for one who has failed on many occasions to instigate the staff to defy me. She claims not to know how I got this position as there were other more able candidates.

The school governing body is very happy with me. Some of the members are still those who were part of the selection process and we have a wonderful relationship. In spite of the fact that they are not learned people, they are willing to take the school forward. We

work as a team and they do not underestimate me as a woman. I guess it is my trying very hard to educate them and to involve them in all matters relating to the smooth running of the school that has contributed to such a good working relationship. I also take it upon myself to workshop them in governance matters.

To face the demands made by people I am working with, I have developed the following strategies, I am very calm, very focused and talk less and hear more. This has made me cross bridges over troubled waters as I know what I say and know what I hear. My studying to keep ahead of them also helps, as in most cases I am able to provide clarifications when the need arises in terms of educational matters.

4.4.3 A THEMATIC ANALYSIS OF SHINING STAR'S STORY

4.4.3.1 GENDER

There is no apparent gender impact on Shining Star's relationship with the school governing body. Even though this is the case, there is a possibility that the apparent smooth relationship she has with the SGB as compared to the SMT results from the over-protection she gets from the SGB chairperson. Further to this is the fact that the chairperson of the SGB has a strong vision for the school and this could result in him absorbing all gender related negativity in order to see the school move forward.

It is very difficult to establish without any doubt that the relationship between the principal and the SMT is influenced by gender issues. The relationship is not a smooth one owing to her claims that an unidentified male SMT member frequently undermines her authority as the principal. The reason why it is not easy to attribute this to gender is that the two had previously competed for the same position that the principal is occupying.

The nature of their relationship could also be purely a perception by the principal which results from the fact that the two once competed for the same position and the nature of

their relationship could also be purely a perception by the principal. The above is affirmed by Hill and Ragland (1995), who assert that women are faced with internal barriers such as lack of personal confidence.

Further evidence towards defining the type of relationship that exists between Shining Star and the SMT is that she feels that some members of staff want to instigate others to defy her authority. The staff in question is female. This is very common in most public schools where some members of the teaching staff feel that the principal does not deserve the position s/he is holding. Where this is the case, the relationship between the principal and the SMT is never a healthy one.

Shining Star's coping strategy has been greatly influenced by the kind of School Management Team she has, namely: an un-corporative and insubordinate male HOD and a very passive and un-vocal female HOD. This has forced her to resort to external help in the form of consulting principals from other schools on a constant basis. The issues she consults on range from minor issues such as interpretation of circulars, to major issues such as the identification of surplus educators in her school.

Where circumstances force her to consult with her SMT she always opts for consensus, though it is usually a difficult and lengthy process considering the kind of HODs she has. Shining Star has had a fair share of challenges in relation to achieving a balance between her domestic and professional obligations. It is apparent (from her story) that her failure to strike a balance between domestic and professional obligations has had undesirable consequences: the breakdown of her marriage.

As a married woman (at the time of her appointment to principalship), certain cultural expectations were made on Shining Star. Her role as a mother in the family is not made any less by her role as a principal, a fact that she is likely to have overlooked, hence her statement that "problems started when I used to tell him that I have to attend to school matters even way after closing time that things began to sour".

Becoming a single parent has not made the challenges any better. On the domestic front, her challenges include being a mother and father to her children i.e. she has to provide for their care and well-being as a mother and be a bread-winner like a father. She has to ensure that all the domestic chores are taken care of and that the children get the best education as they deserve.

On the professional front, she has to contend with the challenges of managing her school and leading the teaching of educators and support staff in order to provide quality education and services to learners at her school. Being a woman, the latter challenge is not made any easier for her. She constantly finds herself having to prove to the outside world that she is able to deliver the same quality of management and leadership that is expected of her male counterparts.

4.4.3.2 LEADERSHIP

There are a number of factors that could be highlighted regarding the management style of Shining Star: First, it is apparent that she has not managed to deal with issues around the SMT. One is inclined to believe she has insufficient conflict resolution skills. She probably uses the 'avoidance style' whereby she hopes that the problem will go away if left unattended. Hence the persistent disagreements in SMT meetings. Her relationship with the SGB suggests a management style that thrives when there is no criticism.

As a result of the kind of experiences she has had with the School Governing Body and the School Management Team she has learnt that it takes twice as much effort for a woman principal to earn the same respect that a man gets as a principal. She has taken this in a positive way and as a result has been motivated to work even harder. She has also learnt that networking with other principals plays a very important role in the management of a school as it helps a person to grow in terms of sharing experiences and learning how to cope with different situations.

Lastly she has learnt that as a person in a leadership position, it is important to empower yourself by keeping abreast of the latest developments in education instead of learning things from your subordinates.

4.4.3.3 SCHOOL GOVERNANCE

Since the school is in a semi-urban area, it serves mostly learners whose parents are working in the nearby industries. Most of these parents come to Durban to seek work but are originally from rural areas. The school appears to have kept the same members of SGBs for over 5 years (this is allowed as long as a member is a parent to a child in the school). This could well explain why she thinks the relationship between her and the SGB is good: “Some of the members of the SGB are still those who were part of the selection process (for her appointment) and we have a wonderful relationship”.

Keeping the same parents in the SGB for a long period has its pros and cons depending on the factors contributing to the state of affairs: On the one hand, the SGB members are kept because they are contributing positively towards the development and upliftment of the school. On the other hand, they could be kept in the committee because of a lack of candidates. If the former is true, the school is benefiting from the relationship and if the latter is true, the school is likely to suffer as a result.

4.5 AN INTEGRATED ANALYSIS OF THE THREE STORIES

Weiner has made the following remark:

“As women we may share certain experiences of sexism and domestic responsibility and we may differ in class; but what unites us is our consciousness that it is other people who set the agenda. Thus, what serve to link powerful social groups are their experiences of ‘otherness’ and exclusion from the sites of power and meaning-making” (Weiner 1993).

The study explores the experiences and challenges of the three research participants and is done through looking at their commonalities and differences under the three broad headings:

- Gender
- Leadership
- School governance

4.5.1 GENDER

“While the beliefs and attitudes held by individuals can be influential, the general ethos and the institutional and organizational practises and customs of schools also have considerable impact on how individuals experience being female or male at school” (Measor & Sikes, 1992:116). This was evident from two of my participants who felt that to be a woman is to be responsible for domestic labour. To them this is natural in terms of men’s work and politics but unfortunately reality dictates otherwise.

Since two of the schools are in rural and semi-urban areas, it is normal for the society to expect men to play a leading role, hence the domination of the school governing bodies by men. This poses an intense battle between women and the society.

Sunshine’s plight is confirmed by Luke & Gore (1992):

“women stand hip deep in cultures saturated with phallogocentric knowledges, in institutional structures ruled epistemologically and procedurally by men and masculinist signifiers, and in a discipline which despite its historical terrain as “women’s work”, a caring profession, remains the theoretical and administrative custody of men.”

Amos and Parmar (2001) assert that patriarchy is not about gender oppression, but about power. Although it is no longer believed that men are intellectually superior to women Archer & Lloyd (1992), it is still a widely held view that the two sexes think differently.

Burning Light's and Shining Star's school governing body members are mostly men. Males are generally more competitive than females. The rationale for this is that men are also generally thought to be more achievement oriented than women are (Bassow, 1996).

Radical feminists argue for the condition that recognises both the uniqueness and separateness of women and recognition of their worth as being equal to that of men.

Male domination makes men unite in their dominance over women by forming male networks. Hartmann (1997: 101) concurs with this: "A set of social relations between men which have a material base and which through hierarchy, establish or create interdependence and solidarity among men that enable them to dominate women".

Two of the research participant's experiences with the community include gender sensitive issues such as numerous recommendations by their school communities that since their schools are headed by women, they must have males as deputies and that they also need to have more male staff, since the communities have no faith in women as leaders. This is attributed to the fact that the schools are in rural and semi-rural settings and, in general, societies in such areas hold men to be figures of authority.

Unlike the other participant whose school is in an urban area where it is not strange for the society to have nominated both men and women to represent them in the School Governing Body. All of them are literate which makes it easy for them to work as a team. Everyone has respect for another's point of view and no one looks down upon another simply because he feels he is biologically superior to another.

Another contributing factor towards Sunshine's smooth relationship with the SGB is that she displays a lot of confidence, and has outstanding qualities as a leader which have earned her the respect of both male and female SGB members. Whilst most theorists argue that women experience more complexities in their career experiences because of

the effects of early sex-role socialisation when they learn which roles are important and which ones are not for women, this is not the case with Sunshine.

4.5.2 LEADERSHIP

As societies by and large reproduce themselves through the schooling system, the potential of schools to sustain democratic systems ought to be realised so that schools can be structured along democratic lines.

Black female principals have a great role to play in terms of making this difference by being brave enough to take risks and initiate changes that would support their school's aims and goals. There is, therefore, a need for female principals to understand the shift in leadership paradigms that is taking place at local and global levels. This kind of understanding and knowledge base is most likely to help them adjust and adopt leadership styles that will articulate change. Their job is therefore becoming increasingly complex and no doubt challenging.

In meeting these challenges, school principals need to develop leadership skills that will enable them to operate successfully and effectively in their environment. An enabling environment creates a supportive environment within which everyone can develop and realise his/her potential for the benefit of the school. Within an enabling environment, parents, teachers and the entire school community's contributions are supported and accepted. The leader in such an environment recognises the fact that everybody within the school environment is a potential agent for change. As a matter of fact, capacity for them to make contributions towards the running and development of the school is made.

Attention needs to be drawn to the fact that I personally encourage the shift towards a participative and collaborative approach. This equally maintains that the school principal plays a very significant role as a leader in that she is a pace setter, energiser and a source of inspiration to name a few to all role-players. It is therefore incumbent upon the school

principal to employ an integrated approach to leadership if she desires to be an effective leader.

The truth of the matter is that a person's background has everything to do with how s/he constructs her/himself Sara Delamont (1990). This is true of Sunshine whose school is in an urban area. She seems to imitate her mother's strong character.

Sunshine has adopted a half-democratic and half-autocratic style of leadership to cope with different situations. This is especially on occasions when she knows there is likely to be agreement.

In contrast to the radical and socialist feminist discourses, Sunshine views her family not as the instrument of oppression. Instead her husband who has worked as a human resources manager has been her pillar of strength. She sees him as driving force behind her career. From him she learnt, among other things:

- How to manage without emotions
- How to rise above criticism and grow from it
- How to avoid confrontation

According to Skevington and Buker (1989), women define themselves in terms of their husband's occupation and position. In devoting their efforts to improving his social status, they also enhance their own image.

Sunshine sees her career as secondary. Her husband's career occupies a privileged status when compared to hers. She views family responsibility as an inseparable commitment around which a career should be fitted.

While socialist feminist theory considers the family to be central to women's lives and to the determination of gender inequality and radical feminist theory sees gender and

production in the household as exploitation by husbands Walby (1992), both theories agree on the role of women in the household as subordinate to the domination of men.]

The value of respect perceived by Shining Star and Burning Light as demanded by the African culture is questionable. This respect is underpinned by a dual ideology:

- respect for elders; and
- respect for males.

The challenges that Shining Star and Burning Light face in their leadership roles can be interpreted as having both internal and external origins. The internal challenges refer to their low self-esteem and low confidence as leaders while external challenges refer to the society's low expectations of them to be good leaders.

[Hill and Ragland (1995) asserts that women are faced with internal barriers ranging from a lack of personal confidence to a fear of challenging the cultural expectations of their role.

Shakeshaft and Cohen (1990) seem to provide reason for Hill and Ragland's argument. They base this erosion of self-esteem on the life long effects of harassment and abuse. In this case which Burning Light and Shining Star have endured throughout their married life.

Measor and Sikes (1992) concur that women in senior positions at schools do not provide examples of "success" as they do not challenge traditional stereotypes. The message passed on is that it is normal for male authority to be enforced.

Shining Star's and Burning Light's humble backgrounds also have something to do with the way in which they still hold to some traditional stereotypes. This seems to confirm Sara Delamont's (1990) findings that teachers who come from lower-middle class backgrounds are most likely to hold traditional gender role stereotypes.

Archer and Lloyd (1992) assert that stereotypes reinforce the idea of “men’s work” and “women’s work” and thereby influence gender differences in management. They suggest that gender stereotypes affect women’s expectations about their own performance. The very description of being forceful, persistent, assertive, confident, rational and tough makes women feel uneasy.

Feminists have argued that if women are generally less persistent, it is the result of their female socialization - they have other roles to fulfil first. This could result in a lack of self-esteem and self confidence - characteristics that give males an edge in the workplace.

While socialist feminist theory considers society to be central to women’s lives and to the determination of gender inequality, and radical feminist theory sees gender as exploitation by males Walby (1992), both theories agree that the role of women is subordinate to the domination of men.]

When looking at the different ways men and women conceptualise their work, Shakeshaft states: Not only are women’s day-to-day interactions different from men’s, women’s style of administration often contrasts, sometimes subtly, sometimes dramatically to the ways men manage schools (Shakeshaft, 1989: 166).

Sunshine asserted that while there were differentiating features in leadership styles, gender is not a predictor of these. Her view was that some men and women principals operated relatively democratically and allowed participation in decision making, some men and women did not.

In trying to answer the question on differences in their management styles, one can see how they negotiate their relationships due to the social construction of gender. Burning Light said: “I bring a caring, nurturing quality into management, unlike men who don’t want to understand female problems. I am like a mother to them”. Shakeshaft’s (1987) conceptualisations of the female world of administration and education with the focus on

relationships with others, is evident in this account. In the discourse with Burning Light, teamwork was frequently mentioned.

My experience suggests that there is a tendency to see women's decision making styles as more democratic and participatory than those of men. Shakeshaft (1987) makes the point that women often use coalition building to achieve their goals. Pinter (1981), as quoted in Shakeshaft, describes women who do not dominate the discussion in meetings, thus increasing the participation of subordinates. In addition, women use meetings as a forum for considering possibilities.

Sunshine confirmed this finding. This was her response: "I come up with suggestions and we brainstorm the whole thing and then they decide but in their decisions, I always act above them and guide them to what is department policy and what is not. I once made a mistake of instructing them to do something but learnt that it is wrong to do so. It's best to reach consensus".

4.5.3 SCHOOL GOVERNANCE

Through networking with the other female principals, all my participants have learnt that the key to an effective school is shared governance. They encourage the school governing body members to attend workshops arranged by the department of education. These are conducted in isiZulu as there was a common problem with those conducted previously because they did not accommodate those who do not understand English.

Through their experiences in relation to the School Governing Bodies and the School Management Teams, my participants have also learnt that the success of the school depends to a large extent upon the ability of the school principal to take the lead. But for the principal to execute her duties to the best of her ability, she needs to be totally accepted as the principal by the entire school community. The Principal needs people around her, especially the School Governing Body and the School Management to help her achieve the goals of the school.

They are aware of the potential of each and every member of their management teams and have learnt to point these potentials out. They have also learnt to entrust responsibility to willing staff members and make sure that the success of the task at hand is a collective effort.

Sunshine is prepared to use her strong character to produce a harmonious relationship especially with her school management team, and hopes that this automatically permeates to the entire staff.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

This study of the three African women principals is summarized and concluded in this chapter. The study tried to explore the experiences of the three research participants and is organised around three broad headings:

- Gender
- Leadership
- School Governance

Their experiences were explored bearing the critical questions outlined in Chapter One in mind. The study has attempted to answer the questions below:

- What are the experiences of African women in positions of leadership?
- How do these African women interpret or understand their roles within the confines of gender?
- How do black women principals construct their professional identities as leaders of public schools?

5.2 THEIR EXPERIENCES IN POSITIONS OF LEADERSHIP AS PRINCIPALS

The lessons learnt by the three participants during their careers in education and the varied experiences that they had with their SMTs and SGBs have been so varied that no common patterns were evident in the leadership styles. It is worth noting, however, that what was prominent in all three cases was the struggle by the participants to manage their schools, while getting little or no support from their SMTs. Shining Star has adopted an

avoidance approach to dealing with management problems, while Sunshine uses a half-democratic and half-autocratic approach, and Burning Light uses a purely autocratic style. She uses the book governance and management policies exclusively in order to achieve her goals.

None of the three participants enjoys the full support of the School Management Teams (SMT). The most common contributing factor is that some members of the SMTs had applied for the principalship positions at the time that their principals were appointed. While it is possible that SMT members deliberately make attempts to undermine the authority of their principals, it can also be argued that the principals feel insecure and, consequently, interpret actions by some members of the SMT as being unsupportive and insubordinate.

The above scenarios can easily be understood by looking at leadership and governance theories. According to some theories listed under leadership, a leader must be perceived as someone who is “capable of doing things right” (Situational Theory), an issue that is normally not the case where subordinates have in the past applied for the same position that is occupied by their senior. It can also be argued that the fact that leadership is often associated with power (Leadership is about power) contributes towards souring relationships between the research participants and members of their SMTs: “if one wants to understand leadership, one needs to understand power relationships in society”.

The relationships between the three participants and their SGBs do not follow any specific pattern. Sunshine and Shining Star have had the same parents in the SGB for an extended period of time and therefore enjoy the full support of the committees, while Burning Light does not. The latter is a direct result of gender: “since the school is in a rural setting, the society expects men to play a leading role”

It is evident that gender issues do play a significant role for this particular principal. Members of the SGB display total disrespect towards her because she a woman. Efforts

to discourage this sort of behaviour have not yielded any results. Both radical and socialist feminist theories explain why this is so. According to radical feminist theory:

“Patriarchal power rests on the social meaning to biological differences between men and women” (Weedon, 1997:2).

The socialist theory supports this view further. Hartman (1997) and Walby (1992) suggest that according to socialist feminist theorists women should only occupy one of the following positions in society:

- Women are either workers and/or producers of workers
- Women’s role is to reproduce the capitalist system
- A woman’s place is in the home

5.3 HOW THE PARTICIPANTS INTERPRET THEIR ROLES WITHIN THE CONFINES OF GENDER

Women leaders in particular have a challenge of fitting themselves into a number of roles that they are expected to fulfil. Some of the roles include being a mother, a wife, a leader, a teacher, a church member, and so on. All these add stress because of the overload at school and at home. Struggling to excel in a myriad of roles, women leaders suffer from what has been called the “Superwomen Syndrome”, where they are expected to handle difficult and time-consuming multiple roles with ease and perfections.

There need to be awareness amongst women of the barriers, external and internal, that keep them from meeting their goals. Each woman has to identify the specific barriers that affect her personally. Women must be aware of the stereotypical image that people hold of them. They must be conscious of their thoughts and attitudes that reduce them to inferior positions; and they must understand their strengths and weaknesses in order to maximise their strengths and to improve the weak areas of their performance. To address some of the weaknesses, a leader needs to improve herself by reading books and by

seeking professional help. Readiness to take a leadership role means women must get the appropriate qualifications and skills that will make them competent. Hands on experience will help women, as leaders in particular, to improve their skills and to show their strengths.

5.4 HOW THE PARTICIPANTS CONSTRUCT THEIR PROFESSIONAL IDENTITIES

The factors that influenced the choice of career paths for the three participants varied from personal choice and parental influence to circumstances and fate. Burning Light and Shining Star had their minds set on becoming educators long before they finished their secondary education, while Sunshine found herself in education because an opportunity presented itself while she was waiting to enrol to pursue a social work career. It is worth noting, furthermore, that while their reasons for going into education vary, the three participants are currently happy in their careers and are making every effort to make successes of them.

All three participants are principals in schools where they were originally teachers. They are therefore not perceived as outsiders, an issue that is particularly thorny in most schools and has often impacted negatively on relationships between managers and subordinates in most institutions and organisations. Since Burning Light and Shining Star occupied HOD positions before their promotion to principalship, they brought some management and supervisory experiences into their leadership positions. Sunshine was a level 1 educator when she was promoted to principalship. This, however, has not made any significant difference in the way in which all three principals handle and manage their schools.

5.5 CONCLUSION

It is therefore evident that African women principals still experience gender discrimination. A question that arises is whether gender is a significant factor in

differentiating abilities/experiences in management. It is the contention of my study that African women principal's voices should therefore be heard and their views be central to providing an alternate understanding of the impact of not only gender, but class oppression on their lives and careers.

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APPENDIX A
INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

BIOGRAPHICAL DETAILS

Describe your childhood in terms of place of birth, parents, siblings, school attended and the social environment you grew up in.

EXPERIENCE

For how long have you been teaching?

When did you occupy the position that you are currently in?

How did you get into this position?

MARITAL STATUS

Are you married?

Do you have any children? How many?

REASONS FOR CHOOSING TEACHING AS A CAREER

When did you learn that you will one day become a teacher?

How did you get into teaching?

INDEPTH INTERVIEW

When did you feel adequate to become a principal?

Who are your role models / mentors and how did you choose them?

What support have you been receiving?

As a married person, how do you balance your personal and professional life?

What are the sacrifices you have made?

Do you see gender as a constraint on your leadership style?

After taking over the principalship, how did the staff, SMT and the SGB feel especially because you were part of them?

What strategies do you use to face demands made by the above mentioned people?

How do you bring out the best in your teachers?

Do you think you are a role model to them?

How do you work with and through your SGB?

APPENDIX B



RESEARCH OFFICE (FRANCIS STOCK BUILDING)
HOWARD COLLEGE
TELEPHONE NO.: 031 – 2603587

18 MARCH 2005

NS. TP MSANE
EDUCATION


Dear Ms. Msane

ETHICAL CLEARANCE

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

“Life histories of four African Women Principals in the eThekweni Region”

Yours faithfully


.....
MS. PHUMELELE XIMBA
(FOR) MANAGER: RESEARCH OFFICE

PS: The following general condition is applicable to all projects that have been granted ethical clearance:

THE RELEVANT AUTHORITIES SHOULD BE CONTACTED IN ORDER TO OBTAIN THE NECESSARY APPROVAL SHOULD THE RESEARCH INVOLVE UTILIZATION OF SPACE AND/OR FACILITIES AT OTHER INSTITUTIONS/ORGANISATIONS. WHERE QUESTIONNAIRES ARE USED IN THE PROJECT, THE RESEARCHER SHOULD ENSURE THAT THE QUESTIONNAIRE INCLUDES A SECTION AT THE END WHICH SHOULD BE COMPLETED BY THE PARTICIPANT (PRIOR TO THE COMPLETION OF THE QUESTIONNAIRE) INDICATING THAT HE/SHE WAS INFORMED OF THE NATURE AND PURPOSE OF THE PROJECT AND THAT THE INFORMATION GIVEN WILL BE KEPT CONFIDENTIAL.

cc. Director of School
→ cc. Supervisor

APPENDIX C



PROVINCE OF KWAZULU-NATAL
ISIFUNDAZWE SAKWAZULU-NATAL
PROVINSIE KWAZULU-NATAL



DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND CULTURE
UMNYANGO WEMFUNDO NÁMASIKO
DEPARTEMENT VAN ONDERWYS EN KULTUUR

NORTH DURBAN REGION

ISIFUNDAZWE SENYAKATHO NETHEKU

NOORD DURBAN STREEK

Address: Truro House
Ikheli: 17 Victoria Embankment
Adres: Esplanade

Private Bag: Private Bag X54323
Isikhwama Seposi: Durban
Privaatsak: 4000

Telephone: (031) 360-6911
Ucingo:
Telefoon:
Fax: (031) 332-1126

Enquiries: Dr D W M Edley
Imibuzo: 360-6247
Navrae: 0825740332

Reference: 2/12/2/3
Inkomba:
Verwysing:

Date: 20 August 2001
Usuku:
Datum:

Ms T P Msane
Ottawa Primary School

Dear Ms Msane,

PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH : NORTH DURBAN REGION

1. Your letter dated 14 August 2001 refers.
2. You are hereby granted permission to conduct research along the lines of the proposal outlined in your letter, subject to the following conditions:
 - a. No school/person may be forced to participate in the study;
 - b. Access to the schools you wish to utilise is to be negotiated with the principal concerned by yourself;
 - c. The normal teaching and learning programme of the schools is not to be disrupted;
 - d. The confidentiality of the participants is respected; and
 - e. A copy of your research findings must be lodged with the Regional Chief Director, upon completion of your studies.
 - f. That you accept that as an educator in the employ of the Department of Education and Culture, KZN, you may NOT utilize teaching time for this research.
3. This letter may be used to gain access to the school/s concerned.
4. May I take this opportunity to wish you every success in your research.

Yours faithfully,

Dr D W M Edley
Regional Co-ordinator: Research
For REGIONAL CHIEF DIRECTOR