

**Experiences and Practices  
of  
School Principals  
in  
Creating, Leading  
and  
Governing Democratic Schools**

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## DECLARATION OF ORIGINALITY

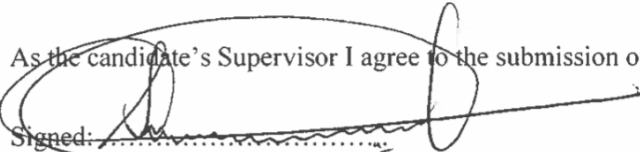
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As the candidate's Supervisor I agree to the submission of this thesis.

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## ABSTRACT

A predominantly authoritarian nature of schooling is still evident internationally and nationally (Maitles & Deuchar, 2007; Harber, 2004; Grant, 2006). In accordance with the Constitution of South Africa, schools in this country need to foster a democratic way of life and principals need to be instrumental in creating, leading and governing democratic schools. Dewey (1916) asserts that if individuals are to pursue and establish a democratic way of life, they must be afforded opportunities to learn the meaning of that way of life. Thus democratic schools play a pivotal role in their contribution to democratic societies (Beane & Apple, 1999; Gutmann, 1987) and to democracy at large. This empirical study explores the experiences and practices of school principals in creating, leading and governing democratic schools in an urban area, south of Durban in KwaZulu-Natal.

Situated within an interpretive paradigm, this study is embedded in qualitative research. For a deep understanding of the phenomenon a case study approach was appropriate. Two secondary schools whose principals were willing to participate and which had some characteristics of democratic schools as outlined in the literature review comprised the sample. Data were gathered through observations of the principals. In addition staff meetings, staff briefing sessions and school governing body (SGB) meetings were observed. Semi-structured interviews were conducted and various school documents were reviewed.

Findings at both schools revealed that the principals associated democratic schools with the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, and as such they claimed that democratic schools are linked to democratic principles. At both of the case study schools the respondents made reference to a range of democratic principles. These included shared decision-making, with emphasis on inclusion of all stakeholders, and the need for a shared purpose and shared vision. Both of the schools advanced the notion of democratic schools promoting critical thinking and respecting the rights and dignity of all individuals. Other democratic principles referred to were representation of various stakeholders, democratic schools embracing diversity, the notion of interconnectedness between the school and the community, individuals being

accorded equal value, trust, transparency and openness. Thus there was a shared language with regard to the notion of a democratic school.

The participants concurred that the principal plays a pivotal role in promoting and practising democracy in the school. At both schools the principals seemed to move away from stereotypical authoritarian behaviour. They viewed leadership as a collective endeavour and promoted participative leadership. This study revealed that at the case study schools, leadership was extended to others in the school community and there seemed to be a flattening of traditional leadership hierarchies. There was also evidence of servant leadership and distributed leadership.

Although both principals believed in democratic school governance and were moving towards shared school governance, the learners' voice in SGB meetings was minimal. However, the respondents concurred that more can be done with regard to inclusion of stakeholders in major decisions. The principals also referred to some challenges that retard the practice of democracy in schools.

The embedded nature of democratic principles in shared leadership and democratic school governance is emphasized, and a model for creating a democratic school is presented. In this way, this study can contribute to the growing body of literature on democratic schools.

## **DEDICATION**

To my two sons, Nishen and Laveshen, my niece, Samara, and nephews, Rahul and Shalem – may this serve as an inspiration to each of you. Remember, anything is possible.

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Before I gratefully acknowledge the individuals who have contributed to this thesis, I first thank God for carrying me through this long, tiring yet gratifying journey.

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

SASA .....	<i>South African Schools Act 84 of 1996</i>
SBM .....	School-Based Management
SGB .....	School Governing Body
RCL .....	Representative Council of Learners
RSA .....	Republic of South Africa
DoE .....	Department of Education
UNESCO .....	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
OBE .....	Outcomes-Based Education
SACE .....	South African Council for Educators
SMT .....	School Management Team
HoD .....	Head of Department
PPN .....	Post-provisioning norms
C2005 .....	Curriculum 2005

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# CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION, KEY CONCEPTS AND EXPOSITION OF THE STUDY

## 1.1 Introductory remarks

This study explored the experiences and practices of secondary school principals in creating, leading and governing democratic schools in an urban area, south of Durban in KwaZulu-Natal. In this introductory chapter I define the terminology used in this study, highlight the problem statement, rationale and motivation for my study, the significance of this study, and the research aims and research questions. I also provide a brief exposition of the theoretical framework, an outline of the research methodology and research design, as well as of the general structure of my thesis.

I must emphasize that in this chapter discussion on the theoretical framework, research methodology and research design is merely to provide a general outline of aspects relevant to this study. A detailed explication will be provided in the chapters that follow. Thus the aim of this chapter is primarily to provide an overview that serves as a synopsis of the entire study.

Focus is now shifted to the terminology used in this study.

## 1.2 Definition of terminology

It is imperative that the terms that feature in the write-up of this study are clearly defined. In addition, it is necessary to focus attention on the title of this study, so as to clarify reasons for the use of the words ‘experiences’, ‘practices’, ‘create’, ‘lead’ and ‘govern’.

### *Experiences*

Experience is acquired through our conscious existence in our day-to-day lives. In our everyday life-world we interact meaningfully with individuals and objects through wide-awake bodily activity. It is this activity that makes it possible for us to acquire our varied experiences (Tlhapi, 2006). It is these experiences of the principals in democratic schools that were investigated. I opted to use the word experiences because I focused on exploring events and situations that the principals have ‘lived’

through, as I believed the data would illuminate my study. Moreover, this is a qualitative study aimed at understanding the lived experiences of the participants. Finally, I am of the opinion that we can learn from our experiences; it is for the aforementioned reasons I used the word experiences.

### *Practices*

This study focused on practices because they are fundamentally meaningful and are also what I believe to be communicative acts. In essence, practice involves behaviour, thus I wanted to explore what principals were doing in creating, leading and governing democratic schools. Although principals may have certain notions of democratic schools, I wanted to explore how they translated these ideas of democratic schools into action. As Freire (2003, p. 77) aptly states, “thought has meaning only when generated by action”. I aimed to find meaning in, as well as to interpret, these actions.

### *Create*

I am of the opinion that to create involves building or establishing something new. During the years of apartheid, schools in the Republic of South Africa (RSA) revolved largely around authoritarianism (Harber, 1997a; Naicker, 2006). As an emerging democracy, the focus is on democratization of institutions. Thus principals, who are key figures, have to move away from authoritarianism and embrace democratic principles and values in transforming schools into democratic institutions.

### *Leading*

In creating democratic schools principals will have to influence all stakeholders to achieve this goal, thus emphasizing their leadership role. Leadership involves human behaviour (Bush, 2008), and how it is exercised and practised are of significance. In democratic schools this leadership role extends beyond the one-man leader and instead emphasizes shared leadership, which includes all stakeholders (O’Hair, McLaughlin & Reitzug, 2000). As I shift my focus to the term governing, I point out that Brown and Duku (2008) are of the opinion that in South African schools, school governance is an aspect of school leadership.



### *Governing*

Governance refers to decision-making (Caldwell & Harris, 2008) and policy formulation (O’Hair et al., 2000) that guide and direct the work of schools. The *South African Schools Act, Number 84 of 1996* (SASA) states that the governance of every public school is vested in the school governing body (SGB), while the day-to-day management is the responsibility of the principal and his or her management team (RSA, 1996b). According to the *Education Laws Amendment Act, Number 31 of 2007*, the principal is now an official member of the SGB who represents the Department of Education (RSA, 2007). In my experience, principals still have considerable influence on school governance. This argument is resonated by Mohajeran and Ghaleei (2008) as well as Naidoo (2005, p. 83), who posit that principals are the central figures in school governance “by virtue of their position as head of the institution”. Principals also head the SMTs, which represent internal management, and this “cements their dominant position” (Naidoo, 2005, p. 83).

In addition, the SASA gives all stakeholders a “voice”, thus articulating the need for shared school governance, which is at the heart of democratic schools. To sum up the preceding discussion, central to school life are aspects of leadership and governance. Davidoff and Lazarus (2002, p. 36) posit that it is “these aspects of school life that ensure that all other aspects are held together and developed”. With this in mind I embarked on a study that focused not only on principals creating democratic schools but included leadership and governance in democratic schools.

Having articulated my reasons for the use of specific words in the title of my study, the key terms used in this study are defined below in order to ensure clarity of meaning.

### *Learner*

A learner is an individual who acquires knowledge, skills, attitudes or values. In this study the reviewed literature makes references to students and pupils. For the purpose of this study, the terms students and pupils also refer to learners.

### *Teacher*

A teacher refers to an individual who teaches, educates or trains other persons at an educational institution. For the purpose of this study educator also refers to a teacher.

### *Principal*

The word principal refers to the teacher who is appointed as head of the school and is also referred to as the head teacher, administrator or head of school in the literature reviewed. Although the individual may be in an acting capacity, this was not the case in this study.

### *School governing body*

Often referred to as the SGB, this is a body in a public school that is assigned the responsibility and authority to formulate and adopt policy within parameters laid down by national policy and provincial education regulations (DoE, 1996).

### *Representative Council of Learners (RCL)*

This is a council of learners established at every school that has learners in the eighth grade or higher (RSA, 1996b), also referred to as student councils or learner councils.

### *Learner governor*

The term learner governor is used in this study to describe those learners elected to serve on the RCLs and who are also the learner representatives on the SGBs.

### *Voice*

In this study reference is made to learner voice, parent voice and stakeholder voice. Voice refers to the “ability to articulate one’s views and have them heard” (Davies, 1999b, p. 40).

### *Secondary school*

Secondary school refers to a school that offers education to learners up to Grade 12. In this study the sample schools are public secondary schools.

### *Stakeholders*

According to Bush and Heystek (2003) the concept of stakeholders is founded on the assumption that particular groups and persons have a stake or an interest in the activities of the school. The stakeholders generally include the parents, teachers, individuals from the community and learners.

### *School Management Team*

The term school management team (SMT) refers to the formal management team of the school and comprises the principal, deputy principal and various heads of department (HoDs). In some schools a level one teacher is included in the SMT, as evident in the sample schools.

### **1.3 Problem statement**

Authoritarian forms of organization are evident in most schools internationally. Maitles and Deuchar (2007) assert that in Scotland and across much of Europe, schools are still decidedly authoritarian. Harber (2004) substantiates the preceding assertion and maintains that the dominant model of schooling internationally is authoritarian. Similarly, Trafford (2008, p. 411) refers to the “widespread and persistent authoritarian tradition in schooling”. Davies (2002) elaborates that authoritarian education is portrayed by negatives, which include little or no participation, discussion and critical enquiry. Furthermore, rote learning, teacher-centred discipline and fear are indicators of authoritarian education. Harber (2004) explains that learners have little say in how schools function, what is taught or how it is taught, and this situation is perhaps more common in large schools.

Even in Africa hierarchical organization within schools still prevails. Karlsson and Mbokazi (2005, p. 11) in a case study of the ethos in two schools refer to leadership of school management at one of the sample schools in KwaZulu-Natal as “characterised by formality and authoritarianism”. In addition, Grant (2006, p. 525), in a study of 11 South African teachers’ understanding of the concept of teacher leadership, referred to the continued existence of a “hierarchical school organization controlled by autocratic principals” at some schools.

The predominantly authoritarian nature of schooling evident in South African schools to some extent is attributed to the system of apartheid. Apartheid, according to Abdi (2002, p. ix) was a “racist socioeconomic and political enterprise”. Segregation was reinforced politically, racially and regionally. Apartheid categorized South Africans

into four distinct racial groups: Whites, Indians<sup>1</sup>, Coloureds<sup>2</sup> and Africans. During the apartheid era gross injustices and inequalities in education were perpetuated. The South African education system from 1949 until 1992 was characterized by apartheid ideology and white domination (Napier, 2010). There were separate education systems for Whites, Indians, Coloureds and Africans. Divisions in education were ensured through apartheid legislation like the “1950 Group Areas Act and the 1954 Native Resettlement Act” (Alexander, 2011, p. 10). The *Bantu Education Act of 1953* ensured that African children were provided with education that was inferior to that of white children (Reeves & Ralphs, 1994). Msila (2007) explains that Bantu Education was aimed at restricting the development of black learners, ensuring control over both the learners and teachers. In addition it served to indoctrinate the learners.

Education during the years of apartheid promoted Christian National Education (CNE). “Education should, according to CNE, inculcate in the white population the aspiration to guard its identity” (Harber, 1997a, p. 116). In essence, the education system had been an apparent mechanism of ideological control to safeguard power and privilege for the Whites (Msila, 2007). As such schools operated around a system of authoritarianism that emphasized a rigid, top-down or hierarchical approach to management. Principals were compelled to follow instructions from the DoE.

Mncube (2005) elaborates that if you visit a school, you will most certainly notice the hierarchy with regard to seniority. The principal is at the top, followed by the deputy principal, then senior teachers, then ‘ordinary’ staff. At the bottom of the hierarchy are the learners. However, among the learners you also find a hierarchy that includes prefects and senior learners. Mncube and Harber (2009) add that in most schools in the RSA learners are used merely as window dressing. They (Mncube & Harber, 2009, p. 54) argue that learner participation is limited to “trivial issues rather than learners regarded as equals and as active co-governors”. Mncube (2008) reports that participation of learners can also be hindered by the leadership style of some principals, who tend to usurp the role of the SGBs, thus making decisions on their behalf together with the management teams. Naicker (2006) aptly captures the

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<sup>1</sup> In South Africa the term Indian applies “to persons who appear to have originated in the Indian subcontinent, regardless of religion”. (Anderson, Bielert & Jones, 2004, p. 48).

<sup>2</sup> Coloureds refer to “individuals of mixed ancestry” (Napier, 2010, p. 38).

essence of the preceding arguments by stating that the South African apartheid education doctrine emphasized control and facilitated a very authoritarian approach.

The advent of democracy heralded a new beginning, giving impetus to the democratization of the education system, as evident in the Constitution of the RSA (RSA, 1996a). The emphasis is on redressing the past inequalities and is captured in the SASSA. In its preamble the Constitution of the RSA (RSA, 1996a) emphasizes a new set of values and a move away from the past so as to:

heal the divisions of the past and establish a society based on democratic values, social justice and fundamental human rights; lay the foundations for a democratic and open society ... improve the quality of life of all citizens and free the potential of each person; and build a united and a democratic South Africa. (RSA, 1996a, p. 1)

From the preceding statement it is apparent that the Constitution of the RSA, which is fundamentally democratic, has to be supported by democratic institutions. This argument is expounded by Nkomo, Chisholm and McKinney (2004), who posit that it is essential for all social institutions working within the parameters of the Constitution to advance a society that reflects the values and principles contained therein.

In facilitating the democratic transition of the South African national education system, various reform initiatives were introduced. One of these democratic reform initiatives includes school-based management or shared school governance through the SGBs, which is emphasized in the SASSA. In addition, Section 16 of the SASSA states, “the professional management of a public school must be undertaken by the principal under the authority of the Head of Department” (RSA, 1996b). This shift from centralized to decentralized school-based management places particular emphasis on the fundamental role of school principals. Ultimately it is the principal who is accountable for everything that happens in the school.

This study focused on the principals’ experiences and practices in creating, leading and governing democratic schools. When discussing democracy in schools, the powers and authority of the school principal inevitably come to the fore. Thus an important feature of the democratization of schools is the democratization of principals. The Constitution of the RSA stresses the need to create a society that is

open and democratic (RSA, 1996a). Being a young, flourishing democracy, schools in South Africa need to foster a democratic way of life - and principals need to be the driving forces in creating, leading and governing these democratic schools. In any education system the principal is a crucial figure that plays a critical role in bringing democracy to life in the institution. Dimmock (1995) concurs that principals can exercise significant influence on the extent to which their schools are democratic.

Furthermore, education does not function in isolation. It is always influenced by social, economic, political and constitutional factors (Mncwabe, 1990). Dewey (1916) asserts that if individuals are to pursue and establish a democratic way of life, they must be afforded opportunities to learn the meaning of that way of life. Therefore, to achieve a democratic society it is necessary to create democratic schools. Schools can thus be viewed as the bedrock of democracy, and need to promote democratic principles and values if they are to contribute to a democratic society as well as to the continuance of democracy. Lenskaya (1995) adds that every society that aims to become democratic should focus on democratizing its schools.

As stated above, learners need to be exposed to democratic principles and practices so that they can emulate this way of life. Harber (1997a; 2004) goes on to state that democracy is not a characteristic that is inherited - instead, it is behaviour that is learnt. This implies that learners need to be exposed to democratic practices. Moos (2004) affirms the line of reasoning that democratic schools are necessary for democratic societies, and the preceding arguments are succinctly encapsulated by Barber (1993, p. 5) who contends that, “The logic of democracy begins with public education ... Public schools are how a public - a citizenry - is forged and how ... individuals turn into ... community-minded citizens”.

Soudien, Carrim and Sayed (2004) point out that South Africa is a transitional society attempting to progress from authoritarianism to democracy. With this in mind, it is also important to note that we are 18 years into democracy, and many current principals received their education and professional training during the apartheid era. They would also have taught during the apartheid era. “Skills of negotiation, mediation and discussion along with accompanying values of transparency, consultation and inclusion were not part of these individual’s school experiences nor

their teacher training” (Harber, 1998, p. 5). November, Alexander and van Wyk (2010, p. 786) reminisce that the principal “has traditionally been locked into a paradigm of power that made them authoritative and hence anti-democratic”. With this in mind, it is imperative to explore principals’ experiences in creating, leading and governing democratic schools. Their experiences and practices will offer insights into ways of transforming schools to become more democratic.

Furthermore, without the support and deliberate attempts of principals, schools are unlikely to become democratic institutions. Harber (1997a, p. 4) aptly points out that, “democracy can always be both created and destroyed, both learned and unlearned”. In other words, democracy would cease to exist if individuals did not attempt to nurture it and keep it alive.

#### **1.4 Rationale and motivation**

The stories of four schools and the attempts by teachers to bring democracy to life in their institutions and classrooms aptly captured in the book *Democratic Schools: Lessons from the Chalkface* written by Michael Apple and James Beane in 1999 has been my source of inspiration. The impetus for this study rests on the premise that democratic schools play a pivotal role in their contribution to democratic societies (Beane & Apple, 1999; Gutmann, 1987) and to democracy at large. This is further substantiated by Gore (2002), who argues that democratic schools contribute to the education of young people to sustain and nurture our society through democratic processes that provide real-life experiences. In addition, the preamble of the SASA (RSA, 1996b) states that the new national system of education should advance the democratic transformation of society. In order to create a democratic society and as such advance democracy, there is a need for democratic schools. This link between school and democracy is aptly conveyed by Dewey (as cited in Harber, 1998, p. 1, and Woods, 2005, p. 32):

Where democracy has fallen, it was too exclusively political in nature. It had not become part of the bone and blood of the people in daily conduct. Unless democratic habits of thought and action are part of the fibre of a people, political democracy is insecure.

The need for democracy in schools and in education is emphasized in the preceding statements. It follows that schools have much to offer with regard to getting all role

players involved, encouraging shared value systems, involving the community and fostering respect and understanding between individuals. This view is echoed by Dunstan (1995, p. 128) as he states that, “Democracy is to be understood through practice, and where better than in our schools and school systems?” Schoeman (2006, p. 140) elaborates, “South African public schools are definitely the best place to educate democratic minds because their doors are open to everyone”. It follows that schools can provide opportunities for democracy to be lived, and this implies that a democratic way of life can be practised. In addition to the aforementioned arguments, democratic participation involves practical experience of democracy in schools and Westheimer (2008) aptly points out that democracy should not be viewed as a spectator sport.

I was motivated to pursue this study because of a personal and professional interest in democratic schools. Having been an educator for 18 years, I was educated and trained for teaching during the apartheid years, when critical thinking was stunted, segregation was continuously reinforced and authoritarianism was the norm. Being taught not to question the information that was cascaded as well as being a victim of corporal punishment are experiences that can never be erased. My memories as a novice teacher are also punctuated by experiences of management members that adopted an authoritarian leadership style; this not only created tensions but also contributed to a lack of communication. All these experiences prompted me to explore the experiences and practices of principals in democratic schools.

Being part of the long struggle for democracy in RSA, I am of the opinion that democratic schools will ensure that the apartheid era fraught with memories of social injustices is not repeated. The protracted and difficult journey from apartheid to democracy “reminds us that the transition from one political system to another, and the subsequent consolidation of it, is never easy and quick. And a fundamental part of this long-term project is education for democracy in schools” (Patrick, 2003).

To summarize, democratic schools are extremely important in creating a deep and sustainable democracy in the RSA, and with reference to this study the aforementioned statement serves as my point of departure. In other words, hopes and aspirations to build a truly democratic South African society rest on commitment from



its citizens to create democratic schools. Finally, my interest in democratic schools is greatly influenced by my personal commitment to democracy. However, democracy like everything else is a coin with two sides – there are those who still believe that anti-democratic tendencies should be adhered to in order to achieve success and quality education in schools. For example in a study by Mncube (2005) there were participants, *albeit* few, who believed that schools in South Africa operated effectively during the times of apartheid where autocracy was the order of the day (Mncube, 2005).

### **1.5 Significance of the study**

A salient feature of democratic schools is democratic school governance that involves shared school governance and is associated with site-based management. There is growing interest nationally in democratic school governance and its implementation (Mncube, 2009a; Mncube, 2009b; Adams & Waghid, 2005; Tsotetsi, Van Wyk & Lemmer, 2008). Internationally, democratic schools have been receiving greater interest (Davies, Williams, Yamashita & Ko Man-Hing, 2006; Harber, 2006; Barr, 2007; Genç, 2008; Vedøy & Møller, 2007; Bäckman & Trafford, 2007). In African countries like Namibia, Tanzania and Eritrea there is also emphasis on democratic education (Harber, 1997b, 1998). The Ministry of Education and Culture in Namibia (1993, as cited in Harber, 1997b) asserts that to develop education for democracy we must develop democratic education.

Democracy should not be simply the subject of a set of lessons, but should rather be the central aim of education at all levels. Thus this study is of significance internationally and nationally as South Africa attempts to democratize its educational institutions, thereby sustaining a democracy that was hard fought for. With regard to the timing of this study, it must be brought to the fore that we are 18 years into democracy and the time is ripe for the focus on democratization of schools and their commitment to democracy. Finally, it must be pointed out that the case for democratic schools and their role in a democratic society has been emphasized many times over during the past century, but never has it seemed more necessary than now as “public institutions and spaces are devalued, and case after case of political corruption surfaces in the media” (Apple & Beane, 2007, p. 38).

Although various studies have been conducted with regard to school governance in the democratization of education in the RSA (Mncube, 2009a; Mncube, 2009b; Masheula, 2003; Singh, 2006; Heystek, 2004; Adams, 2005; Adams & Waghid, 2005; Tsotetsi et al., 2008; Bush & Heystek, 2003; Van Wyk, 2004), this study attempted to add to this growing body of knowledge by investigating the dynamics of democratic schools through the experiences and practices of principals in creating, leading and governing them. This study can also stimulate further research, with emphasis on the teacher's role in democratic classrooms in South Africa with particular emphasis on the teaching-learning situation. Furthermore, this study can make a modest contribution in offering new empirically grounded knowledge, both descriptive and conceptual, about democratic schools from the experiences and practices of secondary school principals in Durban, KwaZulu-Natal. This input may also contribute towards deepening the debate on democratic schools.

Although school reform initiatives have put in place structures and processes for the democratization of education, interest, efforts and deliberate attempts are required in the struggle to move towards schools becoming more democratic. Thus with insight into the experiences and practices of school principals in achieving this aim, we can reflect on these attempts as they provide valuable insight into the principal's role in democratic schools. With this knowledge, principals can look at alternative ways of improving democratic practices in their institutions.

However, it must be emphasized that South Africans are still grappling with a young democracy and the legacy of apartheid that ravaged the culture of learning and teaching. It is against this background that the study was conducted. With reference to the aforementioned reasons, this study was personally and professionally significant and compelling.

### **1.6 Research aims**

In investigating the experiences and practices of school principals in creating, leading and governing democratic schools, the study aimed to:

- Explore principals' notions of democratic schools.

- Examine whether principals are attempting to create, lead and govern schools democratically.
- Explore the principals' experiences and practices in creating, leading and governing schools democratically.

### **1.7 Research questions**

Based on the aforementioned research aims, this study focused on the following key questions:

- What are the principals' notions of the concept of democratic schools?
- Are principals attempting to create, lead and govern schools democratically?
- How do principals create, lead and govern schools democratically?

### **1.8 Theoretical framework**

The focus of this study is democratic schools, and as such it is located within a democratic theory of education. In defining the scope of a democratic theory of education, Gutmann (1987, p. 14) refers to “conscious social reproduction – the ways in which citizens are or should be empowered to influence the education that in turn shapes the political values, attitudes and modes of behaviour of future citizens”. O’Hair et al. (2000) look at two core concepts that they believe best describe democratic education: schooling for democracy and schools as democracies. The former involves preparing learners for living in a democratic society, while the latter is concerned with creating schools that are organized, governed and practiced as democracies. This will be discussed in Chapter Two.

This study also explored principals' experiences and practices in leading democratic schools, and I found it necessary to include in my theory servant leadership, participative leadership and democratic leadership, as well as the distributed perspective of leadership. My reason for this is, firstly, because democratic school leadership is “consistent with the democratic way of life” (Antonio, 2008, p. 43). Secondly, according to Woods and O’Hair (2009, p. 428) distributed leadership “appears to resonate with democracy”. Thirdly, all these approaches to leadership shift the attention from individuals at the top of the organizational hierarchy or move away

from the notion of the heroic leader and extend leadership to others in the organization. At the heart of democratic schools is shared decision-making, which is also linked to shared school governance as envisioned in the SASA.

### **1.9 Research design and methodology**

This study is situated within an interpretive paradigm with an emphasis on qualitative research. As a researcher positioned within the interpretive paradigm, I attempted to understand or provide meaning to the principals' experiences and practices in creating, leading and governing democratic schools. Qualitative research aims to understand the lived experience of the participants (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993; Bell, 2006; Lichtman, 2006; Marshall & Rossman, 1999), the primary reason for having used qualitative research. Within the qualitative research I used a case study approach since it allows for an in-depth study of the phenomenon. This was a multiple-site case study which took place at two different sites (two schools).

Two secondary schools whose principals were willing to participate, were easily accessible and had some characteristics of democratic schools as outlined in the literature review comprised the sample. This study therefore involved purposeful sampling. It must be pointed out that I needed to be selective, since my focus was on democratic schools, and I therefore needed to select schools with some characteristics of democratic schools. The characteristics that I focused on are outlined in Chapter Four.

Thus I selected the sample to meet the purposes of this study, which is the essence of purposeful sampling. I chose secondary schools because at the heart of democratic schools are the voices of the learners; the SASA (RSA, 1996b) makes provision for the RCL only in schools that have learners in Grades 8 to 12. A pilot case study was conducted in a school other than the sample schools. The primary sources of data were the principals, parents, learners and teachers at the sample schools. Secondary sources included the literature as per listed key references.

Three research instruments were used, and this allowed for triangulation of data. At each school these research instruments included observations of the principal, SGB meetings, staff meeting as well as staff briefing sessions, semi-structured interviews

and document review. The principal, three parents, three teachers and three learners were interviewed at each school. At each school the interviewees included a teacher representative, a parent representative and a learner representative from the SGB. The aforementioned research instruments were selected for specific reasons. Firstly, observations provided me with the opportunity to see and hear for myself during that period all that was related to the principal's practices and experiences in school. Secondly, face-to-face semi-structured interviews allowed me to gather descriptive data in the respondents' own words. Finally, the documents revealed aspects that were not found through the observations and interviews. Data collected from all three methods together with the literature review and theoretical framework addressed the research questions in this study.

With regard to ethical clearance, I applied to the DoE as well as the Ethics Committee of the University of KwaZulu-Natal to pursue this study. Upon receiving approval I contacted the principals to obtain official permission and support to continue with the study at their schools. I discussed the nature and scope of the projected study. Pertinent issues like confidentiality and anonymity were discussed. Chapter Four elaborates on these issues in detail.

### **1.10 Structure of the thesis**

This study is structured so as to logically explore the experiences and practices of principals in creating, leading and governing democratic schools in an urban area, south of Durban in KwaZulu-Natal. With regard to the design and execution of this study, the emphasis was not on rigid structuring, which would imply a mechanistic approach with no room for flexibility, contradicting a fundamental characteristic of qualitative research.

As I navigated my way through this study I organized my "thoughts and ideas into a coherent and logical thesis" (Mouton, 2001, p. xiii) comprising eight chapters.

Chapter One serves as an introduction and lays the foundation of this study. Terminology pertinent to this study was explained, the problem statement, rationale and motivation for the study discussed, the significance of this study expounded and

the research aims and research questions listed. This was followed by a synopsis of the theoretical framework, research methodology and research design.

Chapter Two highlights the theory that framed this study. For issues related to coherence and logic, the theoretical frameworks are incorporated in this chapter. First some of the definitions of democracy are explored and a democratic theory of education that underpins this study is discussed. Theory on leadership styles is included, focusing among others on democratic leadership and a distributive perspective of leadership, which not only stretch leadership to others but can also be associated with notions of democratic practice, thus finding resonance with democratic schools. Finally, since this study explored the experiences and practices of principals in creating, leading and governing democratic schools, decentralization of education, school-based management (SBM) and democratic school governance are referred to.

Chapter Three includes a literature review that informs this study, focusing on key themes of democratic schooling and democratic schooling internationally and nationally. As such I reflect on many of the voices that speak on issues relevant to democratic schooling.

Chapter Four provides an account of the design and execution of this study, describing the interpretive paradigm, qualitative research and case study approach. This chapter also provides detail with regard to the research instruments, research sites, data analysis and ethics. Chapters Two, Three, and Four provide the background information for this study.

Chapters Five and Six focus on presentation and discussion of data obtained through the semi-structured interviews, observations and document review. These two chapters are guided by the research questions that informed the common interview questions posed to the interviewees. The data are presented by addressing these interview questions, and responses to the interview questions address the three critical research questions. Data obtained from the observations and document review are also woven into the discussion.

Chapter Seven concentrates on key themes that emerged from the findings of the study. These themes are crucial for the purpose of answering the research questions posed.

Chapter Eight is devoted to summarizing and drawing conclusions from the main findings of the study. This chapter also details recommendations regarding democratic schools based on the findings, literature review and theory. Recommendations for future research are considered, and a theoretical model for creating a democratic school is proposed.

### **1.11 Conclusion**

This chapter provided largely background information to this study, which has been set within a thorough discussion of the problem statement, rationale and motivation, significance, research aims and research questions. Having also provided a synopsis of the theoretical framework, research methodology and research design, a definition of terminology as well as the general structure of the thesis, the next chapter provides the conceptual and theoretical framework of this study.

## **CHAPTER TWO: CONCEPTUAL AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK OF DEMOCRACY, LEADERSHIP AND DEMOCRATIC SCHOOL GOVERNANCE**

### **2.1 Introductory remarks**

This study is underpinned by three theories, namely democracy, leadership and democratic school governance. The focus of this research was democratic schools and, as such, it was located within a democratic theory of education. Hence the theoretical framework that foregrounded this study and guided the research to a large extent draws on a democratic theory of education. However, with the focus on democratic schools, it was imperative to include notions of leadership that advance democracy. Hence I explore theory on participative leadership and democratic leadership, the distributed perspective of leadership as well as servant leadership. The aforementioned move away from the notion that leadership involves only those individuals in position of power or authority and instead focus on the contributions of all members of the school community.

This study also explored the principals' experiences and practices in governing democratic schools, and accordingly it was necessary to discuss school governance, decentralization of education and school-based management. Finally, since democratic schools are founded on democracy, I needed to clarify what democracy means in this context. For this reason I move on to some of the definitions and models of democracy so as to align this study with an interpretation of democracy.

### **2.2 Defining democracy**

Within this study democracy is a salient concept and is thus focused on as a point of departure. In creating a working definition of democracy in education for this study, it must be pointed out that, "Different conceptions of democracy imply differing conceptions of the individual and of human purposes, of norms and values and, not least, of the aims and significance of education" (Woods, 2005, p. 1). From the preceding assertion it is important to acknowledge that with its multiple conceptualizations, democracy is a highly contested term. There are different forms of democracy with somewhat different implications for education, but it is beyond the scope of this study to make an exhaustive analysis of the forms and models of



democracy. Instead, after outlining the origins of democracy a synopsis of some of the models of democracy is provided.

The word democracy has its origins in the Greek words *demos*, which means people (Schoeman, 2006; Sørensen, 1993; Dahl, 1998; Held, 2006) and *kratos*, which means rule (Held, 2006; Sørensen, 1993; Dahl, 1998; Carr & Hartnett, 1997). Held (2006, pp. 2-3) in his discussion on the justification of democracy refers to it being defended on the grounds that it is able to achieve one or more essential values that include “rightful authority, political equality, liberty, moral self-development, the common interest, a fair moral compromise, binding decisions that take everyone’s interest into account, social utility, the satisfaction of wants” and efficient decisions. He also points out that democracy has evolved largely through social struggles. In light of Held’s (2006) assertion, I am of the opinion that in South Africa democracy was conceived through the political and social struggles experienced by those who were marginalized. However, essentially democracy revolves around people, and Schoeman (2006) adds that in democracies it is people who have sovereign power over legislators and government, either directly or through individuals that are elected by them.

In understanding the concept of democracy, various authors (Carr & Hartnett, 1997; Held, 2006; Pateman, 1970; Grugel, 2002) refer to two formal categories: the classical conception of democracy and the contemporary conception of democracy. Carr and Hartnett (1997) clarify that the aforementioned categories assist in organizing the numerous notions about democracy with regard to central values, key features and basic assumptions.

The inherent principle of the classical conception of democracy is that democracy is a form of social life. Its key features include democracy as a moral ideal (Carr & Hartnett, 1997) and direct participation in public decision-making (Held, 2006). Carr and Hartnett (1997, p. 41) add that the underlying assumption of the classical conception of democracy rests in the idea that people are “political and social animals who fulfill themselves by sharing in the common life of their community”. This involvement in the community contributed towards the development of the individual, therefore accentuating the need for participation in deliberations. Based on the

preceding statement, democracy was therefore educative. The classical conception of democracy can be traced back to Athenian democracy that emphasized the ideal of civic virtue (Held, 1995). Grugel (2002), however, contends that Athenian democracy was decidedly exclusive since women, slaves and foreigners were excluded from citizenship.

The classical conception of democracy informs various democratic theories, including Rousseau's direct democratic theory, John Stuart Mill's developmental theory as well as Macpherson's and Pateman's contemporary participatory theories (Carr & Hartnett, 1997). Participatory democracy is founded on the assertion that individuals are part of their institutions and therefore cannot be viewed in isolation (Pateman, 1970). Pearson (1992, as cited in MacBeath, 2004) asserts that in a participative democracy individuals are empowered to make decisions and policies that concern them and their society, but "such decisions are constrained by principles of nonrepression and nondiscrimination" (MacBeath, 2004, p. 19). Participatory democracy is typified by the significance of ongoing dialogue among the participants, and this conception advances the notion that schools are part of the local community which is responsible for determining the schools' processes and purpose (Kofod, 2006). Wringe (1984) points out that with participatory democracy those involved or those who will be most affected by the decision to be made or action to be taken participate in the actual decision-making process or discussion.

Pateman (1970) refers to Jean-Jacques Rousseau and John Stuart Mill as classical democratic theorists, but also points out that the former is a theorist of participatory democracy. In essence, Jean-Jacques Rousseau's theory rests on the notion of participation by citizens in political decision-making (Pateman, 1970). Rousseau objected to the idea of representation as he felt that citizens should be directly involved in making the laws, since failure to do so would curtail one's freedom (Sørensen, 1993). I am of the opinion that it is only when those who are elected to represent the populace promote the interests of a selected few will the freedom of others be curtailed. In addition with regard to the notion of direct democracy I question if the presence of all citizens actually guarantees active participation of all citizens.

Rousseau suggested that participation increases the feeling of belonging in a community and therefore serves as an integrative function (Pateman, 1970). The other classical democratic theorist, John Stuart Mill, believed that democracy offers a “moral vision of the possibility of the improvement of mankind” (Macpherson, as cited in Grugel, 2002, p. 15). According to Mill, participation had an educative function. Both Mill and Rousseau felt that socio-economic inequality would impact on the political rights of citizens. However, as pointed out Rousseau’s ideas on participatory democracy have been criticized as being irrelevant to present-day large societies (Sørensen, 1993). Although there are justifications for direct participation in political life as outlined, I believe that it would be viable for small communities. In countries that have large communities, direct participation of all citizens in every aspect related to political life would not be feasible. It is for this reason political representation through representatives would appear to be favourable.

Carr and Hartnett (1997) elaborate on the preceding criticism leveled against participatory democracy, maintaining that at the beginning of the twentieth century the size and complexity of modern societies consequently resulted in a rejection of the classical conception of democracy. The rise of the contemporary conception of democracy thus increased in momentum. According to Pateman (1970), the contemporary conception offers two options, “a system where leaders are controlled by, and accountable to the electorate,” and one where the electorate has a choice between competing leaders (Pateman, 1970, p. 16). Carr and Hartnett (1997) explain that the contemporary theory is considered a value-free, descriptive concept. They add that people are basically private beings who develop relationships with others for their own personal needs. They therefore do not have obligations to engage in political decision-making. Pateman (1970) contends that both contemporary and participatory theories of democracy support the notion that individuals should receive some form of training in democracy.

Steyn, de Klerk and du Plessis (2004) in their discussion of the different views of democracy focus on liberal democracy and social democracy, which they posit are deeply grounded in our South African democracy. They add (Steyn et al., 2004) that in liberal democracy its distinctive feature is personal freedom. Expanding on this notion, Moos and Huber (2007) posit that societies should aim at supporting

individuals to become autonomous. Steyn et al. (2004) also point out that a characteristic of liberal democracy is decentralization. On the other hand, social democracy with its distinctive feature of equality is associated with socialism and inevitably will require some form of state control and centralization. In addition to equality social democracy focuses on social rights, “group cohesiveness and redistribution of social good including education, equalizing educational attainment and opportunity” (Moos & Huber, 2007, p. 587). Of significance is that both freedom (liberal democracy) and equality (social democracy) are considered the cornerstones of democracy. Hess and Johnson (2010) refer to procedural democracy, which they maintain rests on the notion that democracy is mainly a process involving the structural components of governments and politics. This suggests that procedural democracy focuses on procedures (e.g. voting), which puts emphasis on the formal sides of democracy.

Grugel (2002) refers to two principal strands of democratic theorizing: direct democracy that draws on Athenian democracy, and representative democracy. Representative democracy is an indirect democracy involving a system that embraces elected individuals who undertake to represent the interests and/or views of the people (Held, 2006). Catt (1999) maintains that accountability of representatives is essential. Thus representative democracy is centred on the idea of peoples’ representatives; Gvirtz and Minvielle (2009) aver that in a representative democracy participation of the people is more restricted. Although the RSA has a representative democracy that makes it possible for citizens to participate through their political representatives in the legislative and governance process, the Constitution provides for participatory democracy or direct democracy at local government, thus bringing decision-making closer to the community.

Participatory democracy emphasizes involvement of individuals; however, meaningful inclusion will only be achieved when all stakeholders are able to influence the outcome of the decisions. This would imply that deliberation is essential, thus accentuating deliberative democracy. At this point it is worth noting that deliberation is the heart of democracy itself (Ross, 2004). This is because deliberation “involves accessing comprehensive information, listening to and understanding different viewpoints, considering options, weighing them judiciously, and searching for

common ground that represents the common good” (Hartz-Karp & Meister, 2011, p. 182). The preceding definition links critical thinking with deliberation and the focus of deliberation is to move towards a deep understanding of the issue. Deliberative democracy then refers to a process in which individuals voluntarily engage in open discussion to share knowledge, exchange views, and understand as well as appreciate the perspectives of others, which contributes to agreed upon policies (McDevitt & Kiouisis, 2004). The idea of deliberative democracy when translated into educational terms often views self-management of schools as the means. RCLs and SGBs are clearly representative and deliberative structures that can work towards the idealized conditions of deliberative democracy (Lefrançois & Ethier, 2010). It is evident that deliberative democracy moves beyond the idea of elections and instead emphasizes deliberation.

Although there are various interpretations of democracy, this study goes beyond the notion of democracy as a particular form of government and instead focuses on Dewey’s (1916, p. 87) interpretation of democracy as “particularly a mode of associated living of conjoint communicated experience”. In other words, for Dewey (1916) democracy was linked to the idea of living together with emphasis on communicative interactions and sharing of experiences. Dewey’s (1916) conception of democracy can be interpreted as a social and moral ideal. Dewey (1916, p. 87) elaborates that democracy involves the “extension in space of the number of individuals who participate in an interest so that each has to refer his own action to that of others”. For Dewey (1916) a democracy was a form of social organization in which individuals realized that they were interconnected and learned by working with others. He believed that it is necessary to consider one’s own action in relation to the action of others. Further, Dewey (1939, p. 124) posited that, “democracy has always been allied with humanism, with faith in the potentialities of human nature” and that, “democracy means the belief that humanistic culture should prevail”. It is evident that Dewey (1939) also associated democracy with humanism and belief in the inherent capabilities of individuals. However, I am of the view that having faith in the inherent potentialities of people is indeed laudable - but linked closely with this idea is the question regarding the opportunities people are provided to realize their potential. Talisse (2007) explains that Deweyan democracy is not only strong but deep as it not only prescribes a set of dispositions and attitudes that individuals should embody but

can also be seen as a model of institutional design. I argue that Dewey's (1916) interpretation of democracy as a way of living resonates with the notion of living out democratic principles.

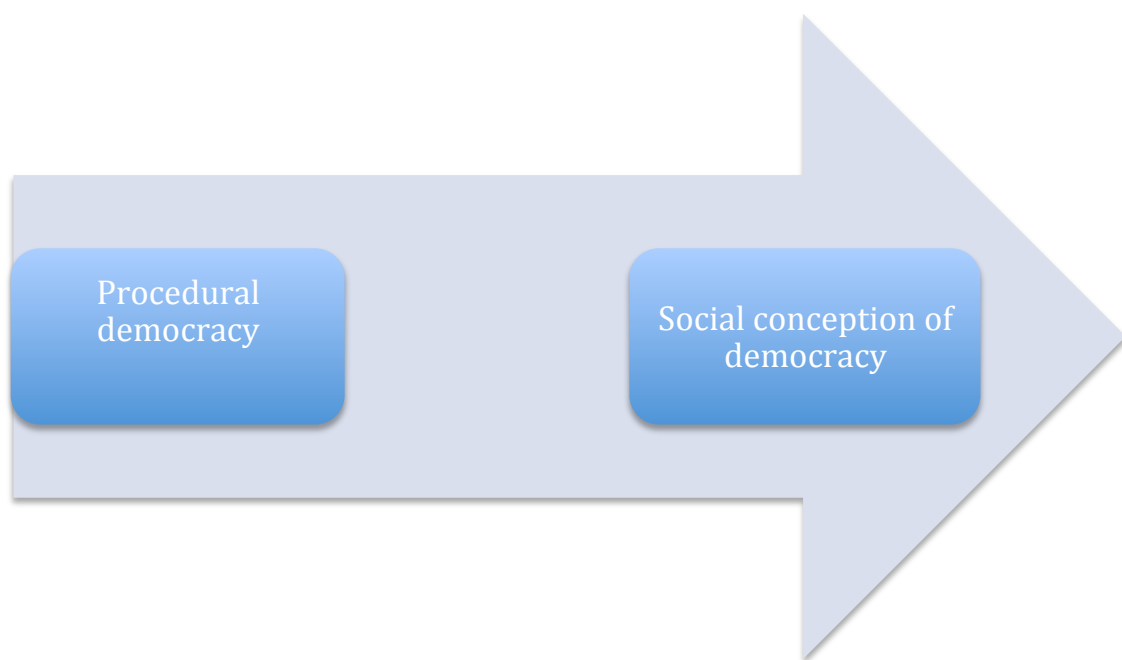
O'Hair et al. (2000) capture the notion of democracy being associated with humanism, and add that democracy as a way of living involves the open flow and critique of ideas with an authentic concern for others as well as the common good. Goodlad, Mantle-Bromley and Goodlad (2004) grasp the essence of the above but also develop the definitions outlined in the preceding paragraphs, by stating that democracy is essentially a shared way of life. "It begins with who we are as individuals and the relationships we have with those around us, and it radiates outward from the center to encompass all of humanity" (Goodlad et al., 2004, p. 82). Based on this conception Print, Ørnstrøm and Nielsen (2002) add that democracy is about tolerance, compromise, willingness to listen to the views of others, willingness to be influenced by the arguments put forth by others, and to accept the attitudes and opinions of others.

Drawing from the preceding discussion, I argue that democracy extends beyond elections and government structures; instead it is a way of life. Emphasizing the same line of thought are Steyn et al. (2004), who purport that democracy is essentially a way of life. Thus in this study, as mentioned above, I lean towards democracy from a social perspective influenced greatly by John Dewey (1916), and therefore maintain that democracy is a way of living which involves relating to and interacting with others in the community. It is about infusing democratic principles in our daily lives such that it becomes a way of life or, simply stated, a democratic culture.

However, within this social conception of democracy inclusiveness and collective decision-making are essential. Faith in the people to be active, participatory and responsible is fundamental to this social understanding of democracy (Hess & Johnson, 2010). Knight (2001) argues that if democracy is to be lived, it will involve thinking and acting, implying that it is a culture. Frank and Huddleston (2009), like many other scholars (Goodlad et al., 2004; O'Hair et al., 2000), add that democracy is more than just a political system - it is a way of relating to, working with and critically engaging with other citizens. This implies that democracies cannot survive

without people participating in them (Kovacs, 2009). Jenlink and Jenlink (2008) appositely remind us that democracy does not just happen; rather it is created through experiences shared by all individuals of a community.

Yilmaz (2009) contends that the various conceptualizations of democracy by different interest groups can be reflected on a continuum, as illustrated in Figure 2.1. At one end there is formal, procedural democracy and at the other end we find a social conception of democracy. Perhaps of significance is my argument that in order to understand democracy we need to move beyond the abstract and practice democracy - that will imply living it.



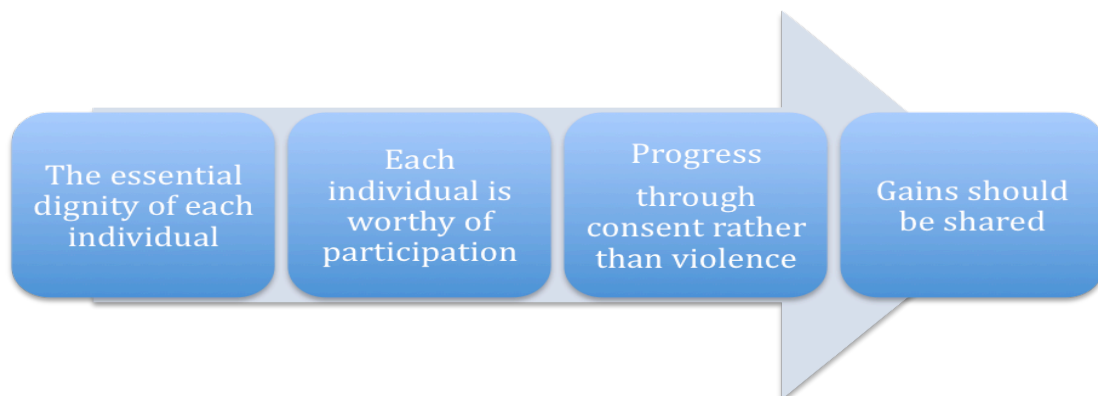
*Figure 2.1:* Reflecting the conceptualizations of democracy as outlined by Yilmaz (2009).

The varied conceptualizations of democracy bring to the fore the argument that the notion of democracy has to be constantly reconsidered. Jenlink (2009) adopts a similar stance, and refers to Dewey (1937) in substantiating this view. Dewey (1937, as cited in Jenlink, 2009, p. 293) asserts that, “The very idea of democracy, the meaning of democracy, must be continually explored afresh; it has to be constantly discovered, and rediscovered, remade and reorganized”. In short, I opine that democracy is not static and neither is it a perfect state that can be attained. Instead, it is an ideal that people can work towards.

Kensler (2010) contends that it is necessary to refer to the assumptions and beliefs that provide the foundation for practising democracy. Merriam (1938, as cited in Kensler, 2010) provides a brief description of the basic assumptions of democracy, suggesting that these assumptions are an active system that exemplifies the processual nature of democracy and a democratic community or the practice of democracy in schools. The five assumptions according to Merriam (1938) include: (1) the constant drive toward the perfectibility of humanity, (2) the essential dignity of each individual, (3) each individual is worthy of participation, (4) progress through consent rather than violence, and (5) gains should be shared. The process should be continuous, moving “towards a more perfect expression of a system that recognizes and honors the essential dignity of each individual in balance with the good of the whole” (Kensler, 2010, p. 3). The democratic process requires the participation of all individuals to move forward, and progress must be made through consent rather than violence.

*Figure 2.2:* The assumptions of democracy (Merriam, 1938, as cited in Kensler, 2010) presented as a system of assumptions fundamental to the practice of democracy.

The constant drive towards the perfectibility of humanity.



### **2.3 Democracy’s tensions**

Having explored some conceptualizations of democracy, it would appear that democracy could be considered as an acceptable form of governance. Nevertheless, I caution that democracy also has its controversies and can be viewed as a contestable concept. Sen (1999) lists the merits of democracy to include ensuring responsibility and accountability with regard to governments; freedom in human life; and its



contribution to the development of needs, rights and duties. Its importance can also be seen as a universal value. However, Sen (1999, p. 13) contends that, democracy as a universal value is disputed by individuals who argue “on the presence of regional contrasts. These alleged contrasts are sometimes related to the poverty of some nations. According to this argument, poor people are interested, and have reason to be interested, in bread, not in democracy”. This implies that everyone may not necessarily be interested or naturally concerned about democracy. Furthermore Sen (1999, p. 13) posits that individuals experiencing economic crisis “also need a political voice. Democracy is not a luxury that can await the arrival of general prosperity”. In other words, democracy should not be viewed as an extravagance that can be achieved only when there is opulence; it is central to informed decision-making, good governance and promoting human rights.

Rancière (2006) believes that democracy is problematic and in his exploration of the paradoxical nature of democracy refers to a hatred of democracy that is as old as democracy itself. In his critique of democracy he associates democracy with anarchy. Rancière (2006, p. 36) draws on the work of Plato who suggests that democracy changes all the social relations within society: “its governors have the demeanour of the governed and the governed have the demeanour of the governors; women are the equals of men; fathers accustom themselves to treating their sons as equals...” In other words it is this egalitarianism as depicted above that inspires hatred and fear of democracy.

Rancière (2006, p. 53) refers to representative democracy as “an oligarchic form, a representation of minorities who are entitled to take charge of public affairs”. He (Rancière, 2006, p. 54) adds that representative democracy was “initially founded on the privilege of ‘natural’ elites”. Rancière’s (2006) statements raise doubts about representative democracy, which he believes is a representative oligarchy, thus questioning if the majority is being truly represented. I would also question if those who represent wider constituencies act in the best interest of the masses? In aligning my thoughts with Rancière’s (2006) preceding contention surrounding representative democracy I posit that a representative system if not practiced with good intentions of promoting the common good of the people, has the potential to promote inequality as

few individuals could make political decisions for the masses. In addition, political power then rests in the hands of the elite.

The aforementioned arguments contribute to Rancière (2006) referring to representative democracy as an oxymoron meaning that it can be viewed as contradictory. Rancière (2006) believes that democracy has little to do with the casting of ballots, and questions the idea of a democratic society and a democratic form of government. He (Rancière, 2006, p. 96) views democracy as an act of taking “monopoly over public life from oligarchic governments”. As such the monopoly of political power would not rest in the hands of a small elite group of individuals.

Young (2000) in discussing challenges for democracy adds that democratic decision-making often involves give-and-take and this frequently results in compromise where the decision reached is not necessarily the best decision. On the other hand democratic decision-making allows individuals the opportunity to express their ideas, thus exposing others to diverse opinions. In addition democratic processes seem to retard policy-making (Young, 2000). Young (2000, p. 4) contends, “Ideals of public discussion and holding officials accountable have little institutional effect”. Another point to consider is if decisions are influenced by selected individuals it could be difficult for societies to take ownership of these decisions. Furthermore I must point out that various authors (Knight, 2001; Frank & Huddleston, 2009; Goodlad et al., 2004; Kovacs, 2009) emphasize the centrality of participation with regard to democracy. If democracy requires the willing participation of individuals, are opportunities created for meaningful participation? Even though representative democracy does have its shortcomings, I am of the opinion that if practiced efficiently it can be considered legitimate. Within the South African scenario, I argue, that perhaps democracy has contributed to greater political rather than social equality. Wasserman (2010) maintains that even in a post- apartheid South Africa the gap between the rich and poor has extended.

Wasserman (2010) mentions the Gini coefficient often cited when discussing issues of inequality and is reflected on a scale from 0, denoting perfect equality, to 1 where there is perfect inequality. Schellack, Meyer, Gous and Winters (2011) point out that from 1995 to 2008 inequality had increased from 0.64 to 0.67. As stated zero implies

that the country's society is equal, however at 0.67 the implication is that South Africa is a very unequal society. Within the South African context democracy has contributed to the growth of a Black elite and a Black middle class; I argue that it has yet to deliver significant results to the masses in terms of alleviation of poverty and its association with unemployment. But I raise caution to the fact that democracy should not be viewed as a panacea to all problems in this country and given the aforementioned concerns; I contend that democracy is an ideal that societies need to move towards. Until there is a valid, alternative system of government democracy requires nurturing and deepening.

#### **2.4 African democracy**

Having problematised democracy, I must point out that in the preceding discussions I focused to a large extent on Western democracy. Perhaps this is because democracy has been allied largely with Western values (Ezeanyika, 2011). However, Fayemi (2009, p. 114) posits that, "democracy is culturally relative," thus implying that democracies will vary in societies. It follows that reference can be made to, among others, Athenian democracy, Islamic democracy, American democracy and African democracy. Democratic principles like respect, accountability and equality are universal - "what differs are the democratic practices in different cultural and political societies" (Fayemi, 2009, p. 115). Mariam (2010) elaborates that African democracy has its origins in African culture and history. In addition, the uniqueness of African democracy lies in the fact that it mirrors the socio-cultural realities of its country (Ake, 1993). Ake (1993, p. 243) explains that, "Africa is still a communal society... People participate... because they are part of an interconnected whole". This link between the individual and the group articulates the distinctive communal feature of African society. The emphasis on the group rather than the individual resonates with the African notion of Ubuntu that views the self in relation to others (Zuern, 2009).

Lane, Hart and Steven (2001, p. 13) in their description of democracy in Africa expound that generally within a clan, village or tribe there is "consultation, discussion and consensus where it is achievable or consent where it is not". Nyerere (1997, p. 156) refers to Guy Clutton Brock's (1959) writing about Nyasaland, where traditional African democracy is described as follows: "The elders sit under the big tree and talk until they agree". Interestingly, there is no reference made to children and this

suggests that in traditional African democracy children were excluded. However, Nyerere (1997, p. 156) emphasizes that this "talking until you agree" is an important point in understanding the traditional African concept of democracy. Hence the prior descriptions point towards local participatory democracy. Moreover the notion of joint action, free discussion and dialogue as well as decision-making by consensus is accentuated. Similarly, these aspects are necessary for SGBs to function effectively as democratic structures.

Having provided a broad overview with regard to African democracy, attention now moves to 'thick' and 'thin' democracy.

### **2.5 Thick and thin democracy**

The definitions of democracy as sketched out earlier in this chapter allude to thick democracy (Furman & Starratt, 2002; Hess & Johnson, 2010). Authors often refer to deep interpretations of democracy (Furman & Starratt, 2002) and thin democracy (Hess & Johnson, 2010). Thin democracy from my interpretation is a rather narrow interpretation of democracy. Carr (2008a) explains that the thick notion of democracy is concerned with power relations, identity and social change, whereas the thin interpretation essentially involves electoral processes, political parties, and structures related to formal democracy. Green (1999, as cited in Johnson and Hess, 2010) adds that the thick notion of democracy focuses on the characteristics and skills that are essential for individuals to become fully participatory members of their democratic society. Furman and Shields (2003, as cited in Mulford, 2008) appositely state that there is a need for schools to move from thin conceptions of democracy to a notion of deep democracy that is more participatory, deliberative and inclusive. This notion of thick or deep democracy can be aligned with Barber's (2003) notion of strong democracy that is associated with deliberative democracy.

Looking at the notion of thick and thin democracy with regard to direct and representative democracy as well as the classical conception of democracy and modern democracy, it must be pointed out that an important feature of the classical conception of democracy is the direct participation in public decision-making (Held, 2006). This direct participatory democracy resonates with thick (or deep) democracy. As opposed to direct democracy, the notion of representation involving elected

individuals representing a larger group of individuals is associated with modern democracy. Carr (2008b) associates representative democracy with thin democracy but Young (2000) cautions against assuming that representative democracy is incompatible with deep (thick) democracy. If representative democracy is confined to thin democracy it follows that “large-scale mass societies are incompatible with” thick democracy (Young, 2000, p. 8). Adopting a similar stance to Carr (2008b), I am actually contending that representative democracy can be aligned with thin democracy but has the potential to move towards thick (deep) democracy.

Having articulated that this study leans towards a social conception of democracy, which is a thick or deep interpretation of democracy a discussion on a democratic theory of education follows.

## **2.6 Democratic theory of education**

The relevance of a democratic theory of education to this study emanates from my focus on democratic schools, which I believe should endeavour to socialize learners to democratic ways of life. Thus I approach democratic education as a democratic conceptualization of education. Farrell (2008) posits that democratic education is a philosophy as well as an approach for expressing democratic ideals within learning and education. She (Farrell, 2008) elaborates that democratic education is co-created by individuals who participate in it. Extending this line of thought is Mursell (1955, as cited in Hess and Johnson, 2010) who asserts that democratic education is education that is explicitly planned and conducted to support, facilitate, enlarge and reinforce the democratic way of life. This belief is also strongly supported by Song (2006), who contends that the goal for democratic education is to enable learners to lead a democratic way of life. However, Smith (2009), who believes that democratic education is inherently dynamic, is of the opinion that democratic education is not about exercising in advance the democracy that learners will experience as future adults but instead is about experiencing a democratic way of life through their current experiences.

Morrison (2008), who provides another dimension, posits that democratic education is founded on the premise that people are naturally curious and have an inherent aspiration to learn and grow. Essentially democratic education, states Morrison

(2008), entails allowing learners more voice and choice in what they study and how and when they study it. It is an education that advances the construction of knowledge through meaningful experiences, interaction with others, dialogue, discussion, self-governance (either on individual or group levels) and trust. In attempting to conceptualize democratic education, Loflin (2008) asserts that in democratic education the following three aspects are emphasized: democratic processes, school governance and civic education; freedom to choose, which suggests learning without compulsion; and self-actualization.

Gutmann (1987) at the outset informs us that democratic education is both a political and educational ideal. However, Lefrançois and Ethier (2010) postulate that although the present form of democratic education in schools is inadequate, it is perfectible, like democracy itself. Bäckman and Trafford (2007, p. 6), on the other hand, purport that, “No democracy is perfect,” but what is possible is significant movement towards an ideal (Knight, 2001). As mentioned in Chapter One, in helping to define the scope of a democratic theory of education Gutmann (1987, p. 14) refers to “conscious social reproduction” and suggests that democratic education contributes to society consciously reproducing itself and as such values and practices are passed on from one generation to the next. I interpret the word ‘conscious’ as being fully aware of the course of action being engaged in. Within the context of this study, this would imply deliberately conveying democratic values and principles to learners so as to ensure a democratic society. Gutmann (1987) elaborates that as citizens we aspire to educational practices and authorities which we together as a society have consciously established. This implies that a society that supports conscious social reproduction needs to educate the children to participate in collectively shaping society.

Mintrom (2009) concurs that democratic education is essential if social reproduction in its most inclusive form is to be secured. Continuing the preceding line of thought, Mncube (2005) argues that a democratic theory of education is concerned with the process of double democratization - the simultaneous democratization of both education and society. Conversely, without a more democratic system of education, the development of a democratic society is unlikely to occur (Mncube, 2009b). However, Gutmann (1987) cautions us that conscious social reproduction is not uncontroversial, and with this in mind I refer to Armstrong (2006, p. 8), who aptly

reminds us that schools “have traditionally reproduced inequalities”.

In their description of democratic education O’Hair et al. (2000) explore two core concepts: schooling for democracy and schools as democracies, which together assist in advancing democratic school communities. Tse (2009) captures the essence of O’Hair et al.’s (2000) definition of democratic education, but adds that it also includes learning of democracy. Schooling for democracy requires schools to advance authentic teaching and learning that focuses on real and relevant issues concerning communities (O’Hair et al., 2000). Camicia (2009) elaborates that learner deliberation of public issues is regarded as a vital component of democratic education.

This notion of schooling for democracy is exemplified by Biesta (2006) in his description of the role of democratic education, which he believes is threefold. The first role of democratic education, according to Biesta (2007), relates to teaching about democracy and democratic processes. This has to do with the actual knowledge and understanding of democracy. Chamberlin (1989, p. 123) adds that democracy “cannot be practised in the abstract,” as it requires some awareness and understanding of issues. The second role focuses on the facilitation of democratic skills that include deliberation and collective decision-making as well as managing differences. The third role, which focuses on values, has to do with developing and sustaining a positive attitude towards democracy.

Biesta (2007) in his understanding of democratic education reminds us that education is generally associated with the production of an individual with specific qualities. This notion, that has influenced the theory and practice of democratic education, has advanced an instrumentalistic and an individualistic conception of education. The instrumentalistic notion conceives education as the instrument for the production of the democratic person. On the other hand, the individualistic conception views the democratic person as isolated but possessing knowledge, skills and dispositions that have been predetermined. In his theorizing of democratic education, Biesta (2007) posits that our understanding of democratic education is entirely centred on our conception of the democratic person. Drawing from the work of three eminent scholars (Immanuel Kant, John Dewey and Hannah Arendt) he presents three different responses as to what it means to be a democratic person, and as such makes

reference to democratic subjectivity. He refers to these three notions as an individualistic, a social, and a political conception of democratic subjectivity, and argues that each notion offers a different reasoning for democratic education.

The individualistic and the social conception, Biesta (2007) believes, are associated with the notion of democratic education as the production of the democratic person through educational strategies intended for the purpose and the person, or through opportunities created for individuals to become involved in a democratic way of life. This, I believe, should be one of the aims of schools. Schools should provide learners with experiences and practices in a democratic way of life through democratic processes and structures. However, Biesta (2007) adopts a dissimilar approach and uses ideas from Hannah Arendt to express what it means to be a democratic subject. His way of perceiving the democratic person can be referred to a political understanding that moves away from the focus on the production of democratic individuals and the idea of grooming individuals for future democratic action. Instead, opportunities for democratic action and democratic learning in action become the focus. Biesta (2007) elaborates that schools should or at least should attempt to make democratic action possible. He emphasizes that the ultimate task for democratic education is not the responsibility of schools but of society itself, and adds that the only way to improve the democratic quality of society is by making society more democratic. With this in mind, conditions should be created for learners “to be subjects and to experience what it is and means to be a subject. The learning related to this is not something that comes before democratic subjectivity. It rather follows from having been or not having been a subject” (Biesta, 2007, p. 740).

Knight and Pearl (2000) add a different dimension to democratic education by positing that democratic education assists learners with various personal issues like drug abuse and violence. Morrison (2008) asserts that democratic education can take multiple forms. These range from the micro level, which involves democratic practices within the class, extending to the more ideal macro level that involves the whole school. Examples of democratic practice in the classroom will include participation of learners when drawing up the classroom rules. At school level democratic practice will include involving learners in school issues like the code of conduct for learners and curriculum development. Aspin (1995) adds that the learner



council that includes learner representation is another means of exposing learners to democratic principles and procedures. It follows that democratic education aims at producing a democratic culture (Ozor, 2010).

Camicia (2009) provides a contrast between deliberative democratic education and soft democratic education. With regard to deliberative democratic education, he (Camicia, 2009) implies an education for democracy that provides learners with several choices by giving voice to various perspectives and valuing inclusion. His explanation thus places emphasis on inclusion, dialogue and deliberation. In effect, deliberative democracy is viewed as a practice that advances the expression of difference and the construction of common goals. On the other hand, soft democratic education refers to an education for democracy that offers learners choices “in name only” (Camicia, 2009, p. 136). In other words, learners are given limited choices. From the preceding discussion it would appear that schools should support and encourage deliberative democratic education.

## **2.7 Decentralization of education**

Karlsson, McPherson and Pampallis (2001) affirm that decentralization is generally associated with greater democracy and this involves moving decision-making to a local level, thereby enhancing a sense of ownership and accountability (UNESCO, 2007). Hanson (1998) elaborates that globally decentralization in education is a popular reform theme of governments, but with aims and strategies that are as different as the countries themselves. Some countries that have implemented the process of decentralization include Australia, Sweden, the United Kingdom, Spain, Nicaragua and the USA (Hanson, 1998; Squelch, 1999; McGinn & Welsh, 1999; Chapman, Boyd, Lander & Reynolds, 1996). Pampallis (2005) maintains that decentralization can take various forms and these include deconcentration, delegation, devolution and privatization. Fullan and Watson (1999) add that the process of decentralization generally refers to structures and in South Africa this would include the SGB. Hanson (1998) is of the opinion that an education system cannot be regarded as wholly decentralized. This is because most decisions will almost always maintain levels of centralization and decentralization.

Grant Lewis and Motala (2004) explain that educational decentralization is very often driven by economic and political aims. In addition decentralization may improve “transparency, administrative efficiency and finance management, the quality and accessibility of services and the development of political responsibility in general” (UNESCO, 2005, p. 12). Within the South African political scenario the post-apartheid government saw a need to devolve power to the people so as to address the issue of equity and quality education (Grant Lewis & Motala, 2004). With regard to economic aim, it was financially impossible for the government to meet the educational needs of the country. In addition, citizen participation in democratic processes had the potential to enhance the transformation of society (Grant Lewis, 2007). Steyn et al. (2004) elaborates that decentralization empowers individuals to deal with issues and bring about change at local level. It is for this reason that I refer to McGinn and Welsh (1999) who contend that people want to be part of the decision-making process especially on issues that concern them directly. With reference to the various issues discussed there was a need for decentralization. From the preceding discussion whatever the motive for decentralization, its success is centred primarily on what it was intended to achieve (Pampallis, 2005). Essentially educational decentralization in South Africa is aimed at promoting democracy, participation and equity.

However, at this juncture I must point out that decentralization can be viewed as a highly contested terrain especially when addressing issues of democracy, participation and equity. In the preceding statements decentralization is associated with the efficient management of schools. Naidoo (2005), on the other hand, believes that there is very little evidence to support the efficiency argument. Van Wyk (2007) also explains that changing where and how decisions are made will not necessarily ensure efficient school practices. In short decentralization does create tensions. Pampallis (2005) argues that although decentralization aims at promoting greater participation by communities in decision-making, this may not actually be the case. This is because decentralization at school level could result in authoritarian practices, thus creating “far less participatory opportunities” with regard to stakeholder participation in decision-making than a “distant centralized control” (Pampallis, 2005, p. 23). Grant Lewis and Motala (2004) clarify that while authority through decentralization is extended to the school it is not necessarily shared with all stakeholders. With this in

mind, I refer to Pampallis (2005) who appositely maintains that decentralization does not guarantee democracy and similarly it must be pointed out that centralization does not stifle democratic participation.

On the issue of equity, decentralization can promote inter regional inequality particularly with financing and quality of education (UNESCO, 2005). Grant Lewis and Motala (2004) state that in South Africa decentralization has not enhanced social equity. Pampallis (2005) explains that where schools, as in South Africa, can raise their own funds to supplement the insufficient funding received from the state creates avenues for inequity. This is because when considering local financing of schools the poorest or what I prefer to refer to, as disadvantaged communities, within their plight, will still remain inadequately resourced compared to more 'prosperous' communities. In essence, I am of the opinion that the deep-rooted social inequity that societies have inherited from apartheid makes it difficult to bring about equity. Hence South Africa remains a divided society. Van Wyk (2007, p. 137) aptly captures the aforementioned argument when stating that the form of decentralization in South Africa that has evolved "is strong in terms of devolution, but weak in terms of managing the disparate and often discriminatory proclivities and tendencies within local sites".

## **2.8 School-based management and democratic school governance**

In education SBM is a way of decentralizing decision-making power. Keeffe (2004) points out that democratic school governance is a form of SBM and SBM is the most intensive form of decentralization (UNESCO, 2007). O'Hair et al. (2000) state that shared school governance is often labeled as SBM, site-based management and site-based decision-making. I believe these terms appropriately suggest that decision-making occurs at the local school level and Hanson (1998) states that within the notion of SBM authority usually resides with the school council. Caldwell (2005) aptly points out that SBM has been associated with increased authority and responsibility at the school level. Aligned closely with the aims of decentralization SBM, as a form of decentralization according to Gertler, Patrinos and Rubio-Codina, (2007, p. 3) generally aims at enhancing the participation of stakeholders in schools; empowering principals and teachers; developing "local level capacity; creating accountability mechanisms for site-based actors and improving the transparency of

processes by devolution of authority; and improving quality and efficiency of schooling”. De Grauwe (2004) explains that SBM is more democratic, less bureaucratic and more relevant because it brings decision-making closer to those who will be influenced by the decisions.

Despite the preceding merits SBM also has its challenges. One of these challenges, states De Grauwe (2004), concerns the pivotal role of the community in SBM and getting the community involved in school decision-making could be difficult. There is also the possibility of decision-making being confined to a privileged group or the elite, thus contributing to inequity. In addition, De Grauwe (2004) contends that SBM increases the administrative and managerial workload of principals. Time is another factor that could hinder SBM especially when considering community involvement. Dimmock and Hattie (1994, as cited in Steyn, 2002) mentions issues of power struggle especially since principals are compelled to work with other stakeholders who may hold different values. In addition, all stakeholders are involved in decision-making and this means that they would all have to adapt and develop new skills relevant to their new roles. Having referred to some of the challenges associated with SBM it is important to note that it has the potential to enhance participative management, promote democracy and increase the autonomy of the school.

As mentioned previously economic and political reasons necessitated decentralization of the education system in a post-apartheid South Africa. In South Africa decentralized school governance involves decentralization of authority to schools through the establishment of SGBs. Bush and Heystek (2003) point out that the democratic motivation for SGBs is at its most powerful and poignant in South Africa. However this study also focuses on school governance, hence I find it necessary to explore the concept governance before discussing SGBs. Caldwell and Harris (2008) point out that although there is agreement that governance is necessary, there is no agreement as to its definition. However, the common element is that it involves decision-making and how authority is exercised. In attempting to define governance, the DoE (1998, as cited in Pretorius & Lemmer, 1998) states that governance is widely accepted to encompass formulation and adoption of policy. Elaborating on the preceding definition, O’Hair et al. (2000) maintain that governance includes

individuals, agencies, institutions and factors involved in decision-making and formulation of policies, that direct, guide, and sometimes control the work of schools. In essence, governance refers to who makes and develops decisions and policies.

In the ensuing discussion I focus on governance from a perspective that supports or fosters democratic schools. A salient dimension with regard to democratic schools is democratic school governance. Keeffe (2004) explains that democratic governance in educational settings incorporates two essential features - collaboration and inclusion. In attempting to define democratic school governance, Bäckman and Trafford (2007) purport that the term democratic denotes that school governance is founded on values centred on human rights, empowerment, involvement and participation of all stakeholders. They (Bäckman & Trafford, 2007) go on to highlight important reasons for implementing democratic school governance. These include ethical reasons that are associated with human rights and the practice of democratic values, political reasons as well as the rapid change in society that necessitates children to be critical as well as self-governed thinkers. From the preceding statements it is evident that democratic school governance with its emphasis on stakeholder participation finds resonance in the Constitution of the RSA and more especially the Bill of Rights. Section 39 (1a) in the Bill of Rights accentuates the need to promote values like human dignity, equality and freedom so as to create an open and democratic society (RSA, 1996a).

Keeffe (2004) refers to the dominant culture of traditional school governance that historically silenced individuals (e.g. learners). She (Keeffe, 2004, p. 22) adds that traditional school governance reflects “a comfortable liaison with authoritarian beliefs and practices exemplified in autocratic decision-making”. Furthermore, principals who employ traditional school governance ultimately assume power and control with regard to the running of the school. During the apartheid years school governance in South Africa was characterized by a top-down approach, with the principals being involved in much of the decision-making. This argument is consistent with the claims put forth by Squelch (1999, p. 128), who asserts that traditionally in South Africa school governance has been “hierarchical and authoritarian in nature” and the role played by SGBs has been to a large extent of a supportive nature with very little decision-making powers. Beckmann and Prinsloo (2009), maintain that prior to the

advent of democracy in South Africa, school governance was influenced by central regulation and was to a large extent in the hands of teachers and bureaucrats.

Beckmann and Prinsloo (2009) point out that with 16 education systems during the apartheid era, only a few of these made provision for lawful participation by stakeholders in school governance. However, parents had limited powers and could only make inputs on certain issues through school management councils (Beckmann, 2003, as cited in Beckmann & Prinsloo, 2009). Sayed (2003) refers to the emergence of Parent, Teacher and Student Associations (PTSAs) in the 1980s. These were school governance structures that were viewed “as community structures which gave political voice to the disenfranchised” (Sayed, 2003, p. 342) and were replaced by the SGBs. Maile (2002) elaborates that in schools structures are essential in the development of democratic practices. The SASA provides legitimacy as well as a framework for school governance (Brown & Duku, 2008). In addition, it provides the basis for the transformation of South African schools into democratic institutions. The *White Paper on Education and Training* (DoE, 1995, p. 82) clearly articulates the need to move towards democratic school governance:

In adopting a Constitution based on democracy, equal citizenship, and the protection of fundamental human rights and freedoms, South Africans have created a completely new basis for state policy towards the provision of schooling in the future. Unavoidably, because inequality is so deep-rooted in our educational history and dominates the present provision of schooling, a new policy for school provision must be a policy for ... creating democratic governance ...

With the notion of schools as democratic institutions, governance is thus viewed through this lens. Singh (2006) elaborates that school governance now involves the active participation of parents, teachers, non-teaching staff and, in secondary schools, learners in making decisions about policy and school funds. Thus democratic processes such as collective decision-making, voting and majority consensus can be practised.

The SASA states clearly that the governance of every public school lies in its SGB. However Adams and Waghid (2005, p. 25) appositely maintain that,

Embedded in the practice of collective or participatory decision-making with regards to educational governance in schools is the notion that school governing bodies (SGBs) need to function according to

principles of democracy as espoused in the South African Constitution of 1996.

Thus SGBs need to work within the parameters of the Constitution and in so doing democratic principles can be consolidated and democratic school governance facilitated.

From earlier discussion on democracy it is evident that the SGB is a representative form of democracy. The SGB represents the various stakeholders in the school community. With regard to the composition of the SGB, it should comprise the principal, elected parents of learners at the school, elected learners in the eighth grade or higher at the school, elected teachers and non-teaching staff at the school. Schools with Grade 8 classes and higher are required to establish a council of learners elected by the learners, which in effect is a representative structure for learners known as the RCL. Essentially the RCL, a democratic structure, is a legally sanctioned body that has the responsibility to elect learners to serve on the SGB. Dunstan (1995) refers to these democratic structures in school as participative bodies. Other members of the local community may be co-opted by the SGB if necessary. Thus the key stakeholders of the school community have been given 'a voice' with regard to issues concerning the school.

In line with Singh's (2006) definition of school governance, Karlsson, McPherson and Pampallis (2001) aptly state that, the SGB represents a partnership of different constituencies from the school community. However, it must be pointed out that this partnership should be viewed as a joint venture to achieve common goals that are agreed upon. These goals should fall within the ambit of the functions of the SGB. In facilitating democratic school governance, some of the functions of the governing body as outlined in the SASA (RSA, 1996b) include developing the school's mission statement, adopting the learners' code of conduct, determining policies like the school's admissions policy and the language policy, recommending appointments for teaching and non-teaching staff, managing the school's finances, determining the school fees and conducting fund-raising.

With reference to the functions of the SGB, Mncube (2009a) appositely comments that democratic school governance implies that all the stakeholders, including parents,

decide on school policies that affect the education of their children. Sithole (1998) explains that, at the core of democracy lies the principle of equity. Thus the parties that bring about democratic school governance should be viewed as having equal status and should be provided equal opportunities for participation. This would imply that all parties have an equal voice and should be seen as equal partners contributing to decision-making.

Harber (1997b) argues that in the past learners played little role in decision-making about how they learn, the content matter, and even the context in which learning takes place. In line with this argument, Squelch (1999) elaborates that traditionally in South Africa decision-making powers have rested solely in the school principal with minimal participation from teachers, parents or learners. However, they now play a pivotal role in ensuring that effective teaching and learning takes place. Van Wyk (2004) explains further that the role of parents that is entrenched in the SASA has become more pronounced. Carrim (2001) concludes that the need to ensure democracy, inclusion, maximum participation and accountability is through the SASA brought to the local level of the school. Keeffe (2004) emphasizes collaboration in democratic school governance and states that all stakeholders should be valued and respected as this contributes to the collaborative culture of the school.

Mncube (2007a; 2007b) adds that SGBs assist in spreading democratic values and principles in schools and in society. Thus shared governance can be seen as a bold step towards the democratization of our schools encouraging dialogue, collective decision-making, power sharing and faith in individuals. Capturing the essence of the aforementioned statement, Mncube (2007a, p. 106) affirms that democratically governed schools “honour participation, adequate representation, tolerance, deliberation and dialogue and rational discussion which lead to collective decision-making”. These are essential aspects and they reflect democratic principles that are central to democratic schools. In short, democratic processes (e.g. collective decision-making) and structures (like the SGB and RCL) contribute to transforming the school “climate into a democratic one” (Trafford, 2008, p. 414).

O’Hair et al. (2000) assert that shared school governance needs to be understood in terms of three components: authority, involvement and influence. Authority refers to



the power that the governing body has with regard to the decision-making. This will mean that decisions are advisory or binding. Involvement refers to the individuals who make the decisions; for example, does the principal and elected teachers make the decisions or do all members have an equal voice? Influence refers to “the issues and decisions over which schools have authority” (O’Hair et al., 2000, p. 298).

Bäckman and Trafford (2007) argue that democratic school governance enhances learning as learners are provided opportunities to maximize their potential. It reduces conflict as the emphasis is on shared decision-making and respect. Mabovula (2009, p. 221), in her focus on school governance, coins the term “deliberative democratic school governance”, and refers to the use of various strategies in advancing this, which include deliberation or dialogue, collaboration, motivational communication, consensus, inclusion and conflict resolution. In schools one or a few of these strategies can be employed to create spaces for learner voice. Mabovula (2009, p. 229) cautions that, “deliberative democratic school governance” needs to be designed carefully and implemented to benefit all stakeholders.

Nevertheless Deem, Brehony and Heath (1995) argue that regardless of the cultural context, power relationships play a significant role in understanding the varied practices and processes of school governance. Giddens (1979, pp. 91-92) posits that, “power is a relational concept” and “is instantiated in action, as a regular and routine phenomenon”. Heywood (2000, as cited in Gunter, 2005, p. 43) differentiates between power and authority and believes that, “power is the ability to influence the behavior of others, and authority is the right to do so”. Deem et al. (1995, p. 133) add that, “power relations are an ineradicable feature of the fragile character of governing bodies as organizations”. In short, the preceding arguments point to the existence of power relations within governing bodies, and Mncube, Harber and du Plessis (2011) posit that power relations can hinder the functioning of SGBs.

I have mentioned that SGBs need to work within the Constitution. However, Dieltiens (2008) maintains that SGBs also need to work within national policy. It is for this reason Dieltiens (2008, p. 289) contends that school governance in South Africa “is set within opposing pulls” of decentralization versus centralization. In short, SGBs do

to some extent have autonomy but are inhibited by national and Constitutional policy. To summarize as well as to align the preceding discussion to my study, I refer to Beane and Apple (1999), who contend that in a democratic school all stakeholders including the learners have the right to participate in the process of decision-making. It is for this reason that democratic schools are characterized by widespread participation in policy making as well as in issues related to governance. I argue that principals should adopt facilitative roles in shared school governance. Nevertheless, being committed to shared school governance which accentuates stakeholder participation requires “a different mindset and set of leadership skills” from principals (November et al., 2010, p. 787).

## **2.9 Leadership**

This study also explored the principals’ experiences and practices in leading democratic schools. With emphasis on democratic processes and principles in schools, it is essential to revisit the issue of leadership in schools. Thus I focus on selected leadership styles that facilitate and support democracy in schools. At this juncture I refer to Johnson and Hess (2010, p. 2), who purport that leadership that advances democratic education is definitely distinct “from mainstream leadership practice”. Reitzug and O’Hair (2002) underscore that in democratic schools the purpose of leadership is to advance shared understandings that focus on a common vision and enhance the school experiences for all stakeholders. With a plethora of writings on leadership, I find it essential to briefly outline what I mean by leadership. Thus I attempt to define leadership, very briefly run through some of the leadership styles (also referred to as leadership models), and present my argument for servant leadership, participative leadership, democratic leadership and the distributed leadership perspective in democratic schools.

### **2.9.1 Defining leadership**

The complex nature of leadership has contributed to the varied definitions provided by authors. It is not my intention to critique the range of definitions; instead I locate this study within a particular notion of leadership in relation to democratic schools, which assists in providing some form of structure for this study. Kowalski and Reitzug (1993, as cited in Squelch and Lemmer, 1994) define leadership as a process that results in determining the strategies and objectives of the organization, achieving

consensus to meet the objectives, and influencing others to work towards the objectives. In essence the focus is on influencing others to achieve the objectives of the organization. Following a similar line of thought is Cuban (1988, as cited in Bush, 2007b) who remarks that leadership involves influencing the actions of others in achieving desirable goals. Another definition is provided by Davies (2005), who maintains that leadership refers to setting goals and influencing those involved to make the journey towards an enhanced state for the organization.

In defining leadership Bush (2008) refers to three characteristics of leadership that encapsulate some similarities in the aforementioned definitions: leadership as influence; leadership and values, where the actions of leaders should be underpinned by values; and leadership and vision. Bush (2008, p. 277) elaborates that the key concept is influence instead of authority, which suggests that, “leadership is independent of positional authority” and “may be exercised by groups as well as individuals”.

Drawing from the above, the common elements in these definitions are that leadership is about human behaviour and it is associated with the notion of influence. It can be concluded that leadership involves influencing the behaviour of others so as to achieve a shared or common vision. However, it must be pointed out that leadership does not occur in isolation – it is a social interactional process among people. This idea is resonated by Møller (2006) in her assertion that leadership is a relational concept that occurs in the interactions of people and their situations. She (Møller, 2006, p. 56) explains that the context influences the actions “but at the same time context may also be influenced by actions”. This means that leadership does not essentially involve individuals from particular positions; it may emanate from others anywhere in the school, implying that leadership resides in everyone and is therefore distributed.

Rizvi (1992) argues that traditional ideas of leadership incorporate values of hierarchical authority and centralized power, while the concept of democracy stresses collaborative, caring and reciprocal relationships. Prinsloo (2003), on the other hand, maintains that leadership generally referred to dominance, where subordinates often

accepted the instructions and control of another person. This statement clearly highlights the concepts of power and authority. The traditional notion of hierarchical authority implies that leadership is in the hands of one individual, which in the school environment will be the principal, or individuals occupying management positions. This will then include the SMT. In recent years the individual-focused heroic approach to leadership, which according to Gronn (2003, p. 17) is the notion of the “hero paradigm”, has been challenged. Focus has shifted onto what Oduro (2004) refers to as the post-heroic model, that places emphasis on aspects like participation, collective leadership, teamwork, empowerment and, most importantly, having little control over others. Bush (2008) refers to school-wide leadership, thus suggesting that leadership is spread throughout the institution and that leadership is shared.

Adopting a similar stance as Møller (2006), O’Hair et al. (2000) contend that leadership in democratic schools is viewed as acts that may come from anyone in the school community. This will include the principals, learners, parents, teachers, support staff, individuals from the community and department officials. Lambert (1995, as cited in O’Hair et al., 2000) purports that the aim of leadership in democratic schools is to advance shared understandings that lead to common objectives and enhance the school experience for all individuals of the democratic school community.

Drawing from the above, I argue for democratic leadership and distributed leadership in democratic schools as these perspectives move away from the individual as the heroic leader and allow leadership to emanate from others in the school community. Furthermore, in democratic schools we need to move away from the notion that leadership is synonymous with the principal. I am of the opinion that democratic leadership and the distributed perspective of leadership offer alternative lenses through which to view leadership in democratic schools. Antonio (2008, p. 43) concurs that democratic school leadership is “consistent with the democratic way of life”, and similarly Grant (2010, p. 66) argues that distributed leadership leans “towards democratic ideals in schools”. Having pointed that out, I find it necessary to peruse through some of the varied leadership styles evident in the literature before discussing servant leadership, participative leadership, democratic leadership and the distributed perspective of leadership. I argue that democratic leadership and

distributed leadership accords well with the notions of democratic practice and therefore have resonance with democratic schools.

Finally, before I proceed with an overview of some leadership styles I would be doing a great injustice by not making reference to what Bush (2007b, p. 402) terms an “African model” of leadership, and as such reference is made to Ubuntu. Similarly, Msila (2008, p. 65) refers to Ubuntu as an “African-centred form of leadership”. It is important to point out that Ubuntu is an African model of leadership within South Africa. However, as mentioned earlier in this chapter, I am of the opinion that Ubuntu is an African worldview and as such it can be viewed as a way of living for African societies. Nevertheless, it can be viewed as being central to African leadership. Elaborating on Ubuntu, Venter (2004) posits that it focuses on the common good of society. This includes humanness, a significant element of human growth. Ubuntu recognizes the individual in relation to others, and it is for this reason that Manala (2002) aptly states that interdependence features prominently in Ubuntu, thus emphasizing the interconnectedness among individuals. I am of the opinion that the saying, “I am who I am because of others” captures the spirit of Ubuntu. Msila (2009, p. 55) contends that Ubuntu is based on democratic principles and is therefore described to be the “ideal democratic tenet”. Msila (2008) reports that not only can Ubuntu be applied to leadership in South African schools, but it also has the potential to enhance leadership. Mabovula (2008, p. 139) extends the preceding argument and elaborates that, “in schools in general, the African spirit of Ubuntu should be regarded as one of the origins of developing human rights culture”. I now focus on some of the leadership styles.

### **2.9.2 Leadership styles**

Leadership style is the pattern of behaviour frequently demonstrated by a leader. Leithwood, Louis, Anderson and Wahlstrom (2004) point out that diverse leadership styles (which they term leadership forms) are expressed through the use of adjectives. These include transformational, transactional, democratic and so forth. Leithwood et al. (2004, p. 4) add that although the varied leadership styles refer to the “different stylistic or methodological approaches”, they inevitably aim to achieve two fundamental objectives in any organization: to assist the organization in determining its direction(s), and as such to influence individuals to advance in the agreed upon

direction (s).

Woods (2005) extends on the typology of leadership styles put forth by Bush and Glover (2003) to include instructional leadership, transformational leadership, ethically transforming leadership, transactional leadership, moral leadership, post-modern leadership, interpersonal leadership, contingent leadership and democratic leadership. Woods (2005) also includes distributed leadership. I provide a brief outline of the leadership styles as mentioned by Woods (2005), but also include servant leadership since it is “a transformational, democratic form of leadership” that has the potential to include all members of the school in the functioning of the school (Crippen, 2005, p. 1). However, the focus of my discussion will be on participative leadership, democratic leadership and the distributed perspective as the aforementioned not only extend leadership to individuals in the school community, moving away from the notion of the heroic leader, but also have relevance for democratic schools.

Leithwood and Duke (1999, as cited in Woods, 2005) contend that instructional leadership stresses the significance of the leader’s influence on factors that directly influence learning, for example, instructional methods and school climate or ethos. Thus the fundamental concerns are learning and instruction. With regard to transformational leadership, Leithwood and Jantzi (2005, p. 31) contend that, transformational leaders “share in common the fundamental aim of fostering capacity development and higher levels of personal commitment to organizational goals”. Transformational leaders are concerned with bringing about change, and Seyfarth (1999) adds that these leaders work towards the aims of the organization. Leithwood’s view (1994, as cited in Bush, 2007b) of transformational leadership captures the essence of the prior statements and includes eight dimensions. These include developing the school’s vision; determining the goals of the school; offering support to individuals; “providing intellectual stimulation; modelling best practices and important organizational values; demonstrating high performance expectations; creating a productive school culture; and developing structures to foster participation in school decisions” (Leithwood, 1994, as cited in Bush, 2007b, p. 396).

Woods (2005) argues that one of the criticisms against transformational leadership is

its emphasis on the top leader as a heroic individual, encouraging manipulation of ‘followers’ and reinforcing dependence on a dominant echelon of leaders. This would imply that change comes from the ‘top’ and leadership is associated with one person. The alternative to this would imply that leadership is shared or extended among the stakeholders. Woods (2005) points out that another problem with transformational leadership is that it has lost an ethical dimension. This gave rise to the development of a “model of ethically transforming leadership which makes explicit the centrality of the ethical” (Woods, 2005, p. 24).

Patterson (2003, as cited in Waddell, 2006, p. 2) posits that servant leadership can be viewed “as a logical extension of transformational leadership theory”. However, Crippen (2005, p. 11) advocates the servant leader notion for the development of shared and distributed leadership in schools. Servant leadership supports the idea of the principal positioned at the centre of the institution rather than being at the apex of the hierarchy. This approach to leadership is driven by the desire to serve, support team members, promote shared decision-making and caring behaviour, as well as empower and develop the potential of staff so that they can give off their best (Cunningham, 2008; Serrat, 2009; Spears, 2010). Further, Spears (2010) identifies ten characteristics associated with servant leadership: listening, empathy, healing, awareness, persuasion, conceptualization, foresight, stewardship, commitment to the growth of people and a concern for building the community. This notion of servant leadership is aptly encapsulated in Greenleaf’s (2002, p. 27) statement that this type of leadership “begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve, to serve first”.

Moving away from a people-orientated servant leadership, transactional leadership revolves around an exchange process or transaction between the leader and followers. Day, Harris, Hadfield, Tolley and Beresford (2000, as cited in Woods, 2005) elaborate by stating that transactional leadership focuses on the exchange relationships between leader and follower and includes an exchange of services for various types of rewards that the leader controls. This would imply that followers are motivated by rewards, which may not be so in all cases. With reference to moral leadership, Leithwood, Jantzi and Steinbach (1999) contend that, the focus of leadership essentially ought to be on values and ethics of leaders themselves. This implies that moral leadership with its moral dimension is about distinguishing right

from wrong.

The typology of leadership concepts also includes post-modern leadership. Keough and Tobin (2001, as cited in Bush & Glover, 2003, pp. 20-21), identify key features of post-modernism. One of the underlying features centres on “multiple realities,” implying that any situation is open to multiple interpretations (Bush & Glover, 2003, p. 20). This model offers few guidelines for leaders as to how they should work within this framework; instead, the importance of the individual is emphasized.

With its focus on interpersonal relationships, interpersonal leadership highlights the need to adopt a collaborative approach. These leaders have developed personal skills that allow them to work efficiently with all stakeholders (Bush & Glover, 2003). Moving on to contingent leadership, Leithwood et al. (1999) contend that this approach focuses on the leader’s responses to the unique organizational situation or problems that they experience. This will mean that the leader will have to adapt his or her leadership style in response to the situation. However, both the interpersonal and contingent concepts of leadership do “not provide a substantive theoretical framework of values and actions” (Woods, 2005, p. 20).

The focus of my study includes the principal’s role in creating democratic schools, and it is for this reason that I refer to Dimmock (1995), who asserts that the principal’s role in creating more democracy in schools is reflected in five key functional areas. These, he (Dimmock, 1995, p. 172) believes, are interrelated and include “human resource leadership, educational leadership, moral leadership, organizational leadership and transformational leadership”. Dimmock (1995) elaborates that in democratic schools leadership is about empowering individuals to lead, thus implying that it is about sharing power. In creating democratic schools the emphasis is on sincere care and respect for the learners’ and the teachers’ well-being and interests. Creating a sound feeling of morality in schools contributes considerably to nurturing democracy. Dimmock (1995) also adds that fundamental characteristics of democratic schools include appropriate decision-making structures, procedures and processes. With this in mind, organizational leadership takes cognizance of the significance of organizational structures and processes in promoting democratic practices.



Before I move on to democratic leadership, I must draw attention to participative leadership. Bosworth (2005) maintains that participative leadership resembles democratic leadership and Kapena (2004) also views it as democratic leadership. Bush and Glover (2003) contend that participative leadership is underpinned by democratic ideals and focuses to a large extent on the decision-making process. Participative leadership “supports the notion of shared or distributed leadership and is linked to democratic values and empowerment” (Bush & Glover, 2003, p. 18). Accordingly, from this perspective dialogue and inclusiveness with regard to decision-making are encouraged. Hence Bush and Glover (2003) maintain that collegiality is a type of participative leadership. Cavanagh (2010, p. 3) elaborates that collegiality is allied with various concepts that include “participation, loyalty, trust, respectful (but perhaps firm) exchange of views, openness and transparency in decision-making and power-brokering”. These concepts, I argue, point towards democratic principles. Similarly, Bush (2007b) adds that within the South African context participative leadership resonates with the democratic values emphasized in the Constitution of the RSA. Somech (2005) posits that participative leadership offers a range of potential benefits, one of which is the increase in quality of decisions. In addition, participative decision-making encourages open communication processes that can assist in decreasing “barriers between individuals” (Somech, 2005, p. 781).

### **2.9.3 Democratic leadership**

At the outset it is important to note that the term democratic leadership suggests that leadership is viewed in relation to democracy. Klinker (2006) maintains that both the terms democracy and leadership have no commonly established definitions, and this in effect contributes to the challenge in defining democratic leadership. However, Rothwell (2010) posits that democratic leadership is sometimes referred to as participative leadership. In advancing democratic leadership, Woods (2005) highlights instrumental reasons, intrinsic arguments as well as the need for internal alignment. The intrinsic arguments perceive democratic practices as fundamental to a good society and focus on the educational aims of creativity, inclusion and reintegration of human capacities. The instrumental arguments focus on its influence on achievement, self-esteem, school effectiveness and “ability to cope more effectively with complexity and work intensification” (Woods, 2005, p. xxii). Finally, the leadership style in a school should not be in conflict with the style of teaching and

learning in the school.

Begley and Zaretsky (2004) also argue that democratic leadership processes are desirable for leading schools effectively in increasingly culturally diverse communities. Perhaps the fundamental reason for advocating democratic leadership is its focus on democratic principles and practices. This idea is resonated by Woods (2005), who posits that democratic leadership involves being committed to fundamental ideas and values that form the bedrock of democracy. O'Hair et al. (2000) assert that differing assumptions about the nature of reality influence the democratic conceptions of leadership. However, they refer to four assumptions of a democratic conception of leadership.

The first assumption acknowledges that in an organization there are individuals with expertise that can contribute to the effective functioning of the organization. This will imply that individuals can actively contribute to the functioning of the organization and that leadership in democratic schools belongs to all members in the organization instead of it being solely the principal's responsibility. Bearing this in mind, Woods (2005) maintains that democratic leadership is not exclusively for one or selected individuals at the uppermost part of the organizational hierarchy. With regard to the second assumption, any situation lends itself to varied courses of action that may be appropriate. In other words, there are multiple realities which should be given due attention. The third assumption involves individuals constructing varied interpretations of what they believe to be suitable means to accomplish those ends (O'Hair et al., 2000). The fourth assumption focuses on all members in the organization engaging in dialogue and reflecting on appropriate ways of doing things in the organization.

From the above it is evident that a democratic leadership style offers opportunities for good human relations (Prinsloo, 2003), shared leadership, communication and involvement of all individuals (stakeholders) in the school community. Woods (2005) takes this further by stating that democratic leadership underscores deliberation and supports dispersal of leadership. Within such an environment individuals can develop to their full potential. The four assumptions provided by O'Hair et al. (2000) have a direct bearing on critical thinking.

Deliberation is central to democracy and democratic leadership involves promoting deliberations. As such democratic leaders will to a large extent influence the quality of deliberations. Gastil (1994, p. 960) points out that democratic leaders guide the deliberative process by ensuring constructive participation. Constructive participation according to Gastil (1994, p. 960) implies “defining, analyzing, and solving group problems through deliberation”. Individuals involved are encouraged to offer possible solutions that are “assessed through creative reflection and critical evaluation, and careful listening ...” (Gastil, 1994, p. 960). During this process individuals also respect the views of others. In line with Gastil’s (1994) interpretation of democratic leadership, Dew (1995, as cited in Horner, 1997, p. 284) refers to various skills required for democratic leadership that include among others listening skills and “group-centred decision-making skills”. Gastil’s (1994) interpretation of constructive participation with particular reference to problem solving has a direct bearing on critical thinking. Paul (1992) as well as Higgs and Higgs (2001) acknowledge this link between problem solving and critical thinking. Ediger and Rao (2007, p. 3) explain that at any meeting a democratic leader ensures clarification of ideas and ideas “are analyzed for purposes of viewing pros and cons... New ideas are sought within the framework of critical thinking”. In essence democratic leaders who are essentially promoting democratic practices in the institutions need to encourage critical thinking because firstly a healthy democracy requires critical thinkers and secondly critical thinking can be used to enhance decision-making.

Gastil (1994) posits that democratic leadership accentuates empowerment of individuals in the organization. Basically democratic leadership values the knowledge and potential of the individuals in the school. Moreover, democratic leadership is rooted in the belief that all individuals “can contribute to, and enhance the work of, the school” (Reitzug & O’Hair, 2002, p. 122). Scott and Jaffe (1991, as cited in Moswela, 2007) maintain that teacher empowerment cannot be separated from democratic leadership. In addition to the characteristics outlined above, Prinsloo (2003, pp. 144-145) points out that the democratic leadership style accentuates teamwork, “two-way communication”, delegation of tasks as well as a “healthy balance between a people-oriented and a task oriented management style”. The democratic leadership style, states Prinsloo (2003), creates an atmosphere in which both the teachers and learners can develop to their full potential. In addition, Weller

and Weller (2002) argue that democratic leadership fosters participative governance. This is an important point as democratic leadership encourages participation of all stakeholders and this idea resonates with the notion of SBM. Essentially democratic leadership has aptly been described as a participatory, consultative, negotiating and inclusive style of leadership (Davidoff & Lazarus, 2002). Although democratic leadership advances collaboration and the voices of the stakeholders, it has been criticized for the loss of time due to the process of consultation.

In attempting to understand democratic leadership, Bredeson (2004) posits that democratic leadership involves two essential roles: that of creator and dismantler. The role as creator implies “creating just, fair, humane and caring conditions, processes, and structures that provide equitable opportunity, access, and experiences” for all those involved in the school as well as the community (Bredeson, 2004, p. 712). The role as a dismantler entails challenging inequities and attending to the elements that bring about the injustices. Although there have been various contributions to the development of democratic leadership I am of the opinion that democratic leadership involves enacting democratic principles in the everyday situations and experiences in life.

#### **2.9.4 Distributed leadership**

A constructivist approach to leadership also adopts a social theory perspective on leadership, focusing on the patterns of relationships that allow participants in a community to create meaning and knowledge collectively (Harris, 2005b). Thus constructivist leadership moves leadership away from the leader. In separating leadership from the leader, distributed leadership can be explained from this perspective. A distributed perspective of leadership is not a type of leadership but rather a framework to understand leadership practice.

Responding to the debate on distributed leadership, Gronn (2003, as cited in Harris, 2005b, p. 163) looks at activity theory which is a more collective occurrence and argues that, “the potential for leadership is present in the flow of activities in which a set of organization members find themselves enmeshed”. Harris (2005b, p. 164) adds that distributed leadership is similar to democratic leadership in that they not only “share, devolved or diffuse leadership” but they also view leadership as a social

experience and shift away from the notion that leadership involves traits or individual characteristics. However, I find it necessary to point out that Spillane (2006, as cited in Serpieri, Grimaldi & Spanò, 2009, p. 215) posits that, “it is not possible to associate a distributed perspective of leadership with democratic and collaborative leadership”. This, according to Spillane (2006, as cited in Serpieri et al., 2009, p. 215) is because distributed leadership can “coexist with and be used beneficially to explore hierarchical and top-down leadership approaches”.

Woods (2004), on the other hand, believes that distributed leadership has much in common with democratic leadership. In extending this line of thought, Woods and O’Hair (2009, p. 428) contend that a distributed perspective of leadership “appears to resonate with democracy”. Moreover, Woods (2007, p. 40) adds that distributed leadership is of significance “with a more democratic style of organization and leadership”. This I believe is because distributed leadership “is the result of the interactions between all those who contribute to the life of a school” (Harris, 2005a, p. 8). These individuals will include the teachers, learners, support staff and parents. Hatcher (2005) points out that distributed leadership has the potential to advance participation and empowerment of teachers and as such to contribute to creating democratic schools.

In arguing that leadership is distributed, Spillane, Diamond, Sherer and Coldren (2005) state that leadership practice is stretched over leaders, followers and their situation. Distributed leadership, like democratic leadership, shifts the attention from individuals at the top of the organizational hierarchy or the heroic leader and focuses on shared leadership or interactions among the various stakeholders, thus clearly suggesting that leadership is not an individual action. However, it should not be equated to delegation, as it is leadership practice that is “constructed through shared action and interaction” (Harris, 2005a, p. 9). Distributed leadership is therefore described as collective leadership (Harris, 2005a; 2005b).

Woods, Bennett, Harvey and Wise (2004) posit that distributed leadership implies openness with regard to the boundaries of leadership. In essence distributed leadership advances the idea of leadership being extended beyond the actions of the school principal (Spillane, Camburn & Pareja, 2007). A distributed perspective of

leadership acknowledges the work of individuals who contribute to leadership practice, even if it includes an individual who is not defined as a leader (Harris & Spillane, 2008). This is of significance for democratic schools, which encourage shared decision-making.

Spillane (2005) comments that although distributed leadership allows for shared leadership, it is not synonymous with shared leadership or team leadership. He (Spillane, 2005, p. 149) adds that team leadership “does not necessarily involve subscribing to a distributed perspective in which leadership practice is viewed as the interaction of leaders, followers, and situation”. However, it is also important to note that, a distributed perspective is not intended to work against or undermine the role of the school principal. Instead it can enhance our understanding of how leadership involves more than the actions of the school leader (Spillane et al., 2007). Hodgkinson (1991), Ryan (2003) and Starratt (2004), as cited in Wright (2008), posit that the distributed approach to leadership emphasizes non-hierarchical and inclusive leadership that promotes collaborative as well as ethical practice.

Taking the preceding idea further, Stoll and Temperley (2008) assert that distributed leadership encourages teamwork and functions successfully in an environment where there is mutual support and trust. Distributed leadership can function through ad hoc arrangements, and this includes temporary teams (Woods et al., 2004). Leithwood, Day, Sammons, Harris and Hopkins (2006) state that it is assumed that distributed leadership increases opportunities for a school to benefit from the expertise of the various individuals in the organization, and as such it capitalizes on the strengths of its members. In this way individuals are provided with greater opportunities to learn from others. Woods et al. (2004) refer to fluid leadership that focuses on expertise instead of position in the organization. Leithwood et al. (2006) elaborate that distributed leadership puts emphasis on the idea of interdependence among all individuals, and more specifically how an individual’s behaviour has an influence on the organization as a whole. In effect, distributed leadership not only allows others to lead but it also allows individuals to work together “giving them a legitimate source of authority” (Harris, 2005b, p. 169).

Gunter (2005) captures the essence of the preceding statements and as such focuses on three elements that currently characterize distributed leadership. Firstly, distributed leadership as authorized is where work is distributed from the principal to others. Secondly, distributed leadership as dispersed is where work within the organization goes on without a formal structure of a hierarchy, and thirdly, distributed leadership is democratic, accentuating the idea of inclusivity.

Spillane (2005) points out that the distributed perspective of leadership focuses on two aspects: the leader-plus aspect and the practice aspect. With regard to the leader-plus aspect, Spillane and Camburn (2006) assert that leadership in schools can involve numerous individuals and, as highlighted earlier, leadership can emerge from any position in the organization. The practice aspect of the distributed perspective of leadership “sees leadership *practice* as a product of the interactions of school *leaders*, *followers*, and their *situations*” (Spillane & Camburn, 2006, p. 9). Instead of focusing on the actions of those in leadership positions, distributed leadership accentuates the interactions of individuals and their situations (Spillane et al., 2007; Harris & Spillane, 2008). Spillane and Camburn (2006) posit that it is at the intersection of the three elements, which as mentioned above are leaders, followers and situations that practice is shaped.

Spillane (2004) identifies three types of distributed leadership: collaborated distribution, collective distribution and coordinated distribution. With collaborated distribution “practice is stretched over two or more leaders who work together in place and time” (Spillane, 2006; Spillane, Diamond & Jita, 2003, as cited in Spillane, Hunt & Healey, 2008, p. 10) to carry out the same leadership task. Collective distribution refers to practice that is stretched over the work of two or more leaders who execute a leadership task by working separately yet interdependently (Spillane et al., 2008). Finally, coordinated leadership is characterized by leadership tasks that involve activities that have to be carried out sequentially by the leaders. Whatever the type of distribution, it is evident that the emphasis is on leadership practice and leadership is not solely the practice of a single individual. In this way the leadership abilities of others in the organization are developed.

However, Williams (2011, p. 197) maintains that distributed leadership is grounded in the idea that all teachers are “willing and able to assume leadership responsibilities”, and this assumption can be challenged. Mulford (2008), in his discussion on barriers to distributing leadership, refers to the persistent traditional notion of the principal as the heroic leader by both principals and teachers. He (Mulford, 2008) also mentions accountability as a barrier to the distributed perspective of leadership. Woods et al. (2004) extend this idea through their argument that leaders in institutions are ultimately accountable for the performance of the organization and set certain goals that are viewed as non-negotiable. However, as we move towards democratic schools the traditional hierarchical organizational structures in schools need to evolve and accommodate a distributed perspective of leadership as it “accords well with the ideas of democratic practice” (DoE, 2008, p. 60).

On the other hand, Spillane (2005) poses an interesting point that within the distributed perspective of leadership, leadership can be democratic or autocratic and because leadership is extended to others in the school it does not necessarily imply that leadership is democratic. For example, those in formal leadership positions can unilaterally decide whom leadership should be extended to. I point out that in South Africa the principal is ultimately accountable for what goes on in the school. It follows that the principal is ultimately responsible for which practices can be distributed and how distribution occurs (Grant, Gardner, Kajee, Moodley & Somaroo, 2010). This, I argue, can be done autocratically or democratically. With this in mind, perhaps it is necessary to focus on democratic distributed leadership in democratic schools. Hence I concur that in transforming schools into democratic learning communities, a democratic form of distributed leadership is necessary (Grant, 2010).

Youngs (2007) points out that democratic distributed leadership acknowledges that leadership is fluid. Unlike distributed leadership, that tends to overlook parent and learner voice, a “democratic view of distributed leadership goes beyond consulting students and parents in decision-making processes to assisting them develop their own leadership voice” (Youngs, 2007, p. 6). Thus the issue of inclusion and exclusion of stakeholders in relation to leadership comes to the fore. Essentially a democratic distributed perspective of leadership embraces leadership that extends beyond what is official; “It intentionally positions all members of a school community as potential



sources of leadership” (Youngs, 2007, p. 7). Grant et al. (2010) concur that a democratic distributed perspective of leadership has the potential to contribute towards democratization of schools.

## **2.10 Conclusion**

This chapter served to illuminate my study through an explanation of the conceptual and theoretical underpinnings. In mapping out my theoretical framework, I initially defined the term democracy with reference to my study, and articulated that this study is influenced largely by Dewey’s (1916) conception of democracy. I also focused on the assumptions of democracy and discussed a democratic theory of education. Thereafter I explored democratic school governance and leadership in democratic schools. My discussion on leadership focused on leadership styles that move away from the notion of the heroic leader and extend leadership to all individuals in the school community. As such, these leadership styles have relevance for democratic schools. I next proceed with a discussion on the key themes of democratic schooling.

## **CHAPTER THREE: KEY THEMES OF DEMOCRATIC SCHOOLING**

### **3.1 Introductory remarks**

There is a global trend to move towards democratic societies and, as such, attempts to democratize education systems have increased in momentum both internationally (Aspin, 1995) and nationally. In this chapter I look at international trends in democratic schooling, probe into why the need for democracy in schools, explore democratic schools and democratic principles, democratic school development, the role of the principal in a democratic school, school culture, the trends of democratic schooling in South Africa, as well as the challenges to and controversies in democratic school development.

### **3.2 International trends of democratic schooling**

Numerous international studies that relate to democratic schools have been conducted in countries such as Australia (Dobozy, 2007); Botswana (Moswela) 2007; Turkey (Genç, 2008); Norway (Vedøy & Møller, 2007); England (Wilson, 2009; Davies et al., 2006); the USA (Barr, 2007); and Ireland (Keogh & Whyte, 2005).

Dobozy's (2007) study on learners' experiences of democracy in their everyday school life in Western Australia aimed to explore in detail what might signify democratic education through empirical research as well as at a philosophical level. In essence the study looked at the role of education in and for democracy and human rights in Western Australia. She (Dobozy, 2007) posits that instead of acting out parliamentary sessions, which are on an abstract level, learners should instead be exposed to democratic educational practices. This has a direct bearing on the context and culture of the school. The sample schools had to be places that promoted democratic educational practices. In these schools the learners "were not seen as 'objects to be acted upon', but rather were trusted to be subjects of rights and responsibilities" (Dobozy, 2007, p. 119). The learners in the sample schools were treated with respect and their right to dignity was also recognized. Referring to the school rules at the case-study sites, these were reflected as statements of principles instead of an exhaustive list of what should or should not be done. In addition, the learners were granted greater participation in decision-making and this inevitably improved the channels of communication. The study found that it is possible for

schools through everyday practices to educate in and for democracy. This study is an attestation to burgeoning attempts to move towards democratic schools.

In addition, Dobozy (2007) explains that in transforming their schools from traditional institutions to democratic learning communities, principals extend their practices so as to become more inclusive. Teachers are encouraged to share their practices with others and thus promote collaboration. The school also starts including those outside the school, thus interacting with the local community. Moreover, according to the principals at the case study schools, inclusion of learners in decision-making contributed towards making the schools friendlier places. The principals maintained that the teacher-learner interactions also made the schools friendlier places. The principals were convinced that the practice of democracy in their schools had a positive influence on the school culture and the learner as an individual. In addition, democratic experiences and practices contributed towards decreasing behavioural problems and led to “the development of social and political empowerment of students” (Dobozy, 2007, p. 126).

In a qualitative study that explored democratic practices in primary schools in Botswana, Moswela (2007) investigated the various leadership styles used by the principals. The population sample comprised 64 primary school educators. Moswela (2007) concluded that majority of the school principals practice participative democracy with regard to their teachers. In addition the democratic practices prevalent in schools were attributed to a large extent to school improvement initiatives that were put forth by the Ministry of Education. These improvement strategies are in line with the democratic ideals and values of the country. Moswela (2007) maintains that there exists a correlation between leadership that empowers teachers and school performance. This study also found that democratic leadership styles in schools could benefit both teachers and learners. With regard to the teachers, it offers opportunities for professional growth. Further, the performance of the school can improve if principals and teachers are jointly responsible for decisions that affect the school. This was evident in the following responses from a participant:

Teachers get a sense of ownership of the school and work hard if they feel they are sufficiently involved in the decision-making process of the school. Teachers give of their best in a collaborative and supportive work environment. (Moswela, 2007, p. 25)

Basically the respondent is suggesting that shared decision-making contributes to school improvement. Interestingly, in an exploratory study by Harris and Chapman (2002, p. 2) on successful leadership practices and school improvement strategies in secondary schools in England, principals “acknowledged that they had all adopted autocratic leadership approaches at critical times”. However, they concurred that adopting autocratic leadership “was least likely to lead to sustained school improvement” (Harris & Chapman, 2002, p. 2).

Elaborating on the issue of leadership, in a qualitative study on school councils in democratic schools in England by Inman and Burke (2002, p. 36), a respondent stated that a democratic school,

... is about facilitating and encouraging leadership qualities in anybody and everybody and that includes the pupils and anybody that is connected with the community of people all working together ... The school is run by everybody in it. Everyone is part of the decision-making progress.

The preceding response suggests that leadership in a democratic school extends to others in the school and hence does not lie solely in the principal.

Genç (2008) and Vedøy and Møller (2007) focused their studies on principals in democratic schools. Genç (2008) evaluated teachers’ views of primary school principals’ practice of democratic values in Turkey and suggests that the principal should not only put into practice democratic values but also create a democratic educational environment, which in turn will contribute to the progress of a democratic school. Genç (2008) states that it is not possible to learn in an environment that is undemocratic. Accordingly the behaviour of principals and teachers should be in line with democratic values. It follows that democratic schools are influenced to a large extent by principals who practice democracy. In other words, a democratic school depends on the practice of democratic principles and values. Genç’s (2008) study also concluded that gender, educational level and membership of a union make a difference in terms of practising democratic values.

Vedøy and Møller (2007), from their study in Norway, posit that the principal plays a crucial role with regard to involving all stakeholders in democratic schools. “A caring approach through focus on possibilities and respect, not on deficits, is crucial” (Vedøy

& Møller, 2007, p. 58). Thus in this study the notion of the principal as the key agent who has substantial influence on the extent to which a school becomes democratic is emphasized.

Barr (2007) conducted a nationwide descriptive study of the democratic practices of various democratic schools in the USA, even though he believed that traditional schools still remain bureaucratic in nature. In trying to understand what may characterize democratic schools, Barr (2007) looked at both public schools (termed alternative schools) and private schools (termed free schools). Although the public schools were larger institutions, characterized by greater bureaucracy these schools implemented more practices to establish democracy. The free schools were less bureaucratic and made greater use of community service to establish citizenship. Principals were required to describe how the school addresses issues like: 1) shared decision-making among learners and teachers, 2) a learner-centred approach to teaching and learning, 3) equality among learners and teachers, and 4) the community as an extension of the classroom.

With regard to shared decision-making the common response was weekly meetings with teachers and learners. However, the public schools provided more detailed responses and included various committees that learners could be on. One of the differences between public schools and free schools involved establishing a learner-centred approach to education. In alternative schools, learners did not have a lot of input into what they learned. However, they had a lot of input into how they learned. This demonstrated the schools' need to adhere to a State-regulated curriculum that focused primarily on testing and learner performance. On the issue of creating equality among teachers and learners there was very little difference between these schools. Free schools used the community as a classroom and public schools focused on community service. From this study the overarching themes or characteristics of democratic schools revealed firstly, the emphasis on equal decision-making among learners and staff, and secondly, these schools had learner-led judicial systems aimed at learner involvement in discipline. These schools displayed respect for differences and valued both the teacher and learner voice.

Elaborating on the issue of the curriculum a similar situation is evident in South African schools, with the emphasis on learner performance and a set curriculum. With regard to the above study this differed in the free schools, as they adopted a much more *laissez faire* approach to teaching and learning. At the sample schools it was acceptable for learners to choose how, what and when they learned (Barr, 2007). What was interesting was that all schools respected and practiced the notion of “one person, one vote” (Barr, 2007, p. 7). With insight into some of the democratic practices in the case study schools, principals can move in the direction of creating (more) democratic institutions.

Similarly, Beane and Apple (1999) in their case for democratic schools refer to various actions as examples of democratic practices in American public schools. These include learners sharing solutions to community problems, secondary school learners conducting a voter registration drive among ethnic minority residents, learners becoming involved in school design decisions, and learners and teachers collaborating to create a relevant curriculum. These efforts reinforce the idea that democracy can be lived in schools.

However, Davies (1999b) advises that the practice of democracy in schools extends beyond a leadership style preferred by the principal. Rather, it “refers to a continuous political process” where decision-making is not only transparent but also open to challenge, and all individuals are involved in the organization of the school (Davies, 1999b, p. 39). The preceding statement implies that there is collective decision-making with regard to the rules and policies, which the stakeholders agree to abide by. In addition, the rights of all individuals, including the learners, are upheld. At this point I find it necessary to explain that the terms shared decision-making, participatory decision-making and collective decision-making refer to democratic practices.

Moss (2007) elaborates that democratic practice involves respect for diversity, encouraging critical thinking as well as acknowledging various perspectives and diverse paradigms with regard to understanding the world. Rusch (1995, p. 3) posits that in schools democratic practices must be perceived as “collections and collaborations of people rather than organizational structures or programs”.

Shared responsibility, which is inextricably linked to shared decision-making, is the essence of democratic schools. Shared decision-making in democratic schools extends to teachers, parents, community members and, most importantly, the learners. There is compelling evidence to support the fact that learner ‘voice’ can have a significant impact on learners and schools. In 2005 a jointly funded research project by the Carnegie Young People Initiative (as part of the Carnegie United Kingdom Trust) and the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation explored the impact of learner participation in schools. They focused specifically on secondary schools in England and found that learners in “more democratic schools were happier and felt more in control of their learning” (Davies et al., 2006, p. 2). There was a boost in learner self-esteem and confidence; “This came from taking responsibility and having a sense of ownership of various aspects of school life” (Davies et al., 2006, p. 2). Improved teacher-learner relationships also emerged as learners felt that they were listened to.

Furthermore, it was found that participation in and out of school “was an apprentice in democracy, where skills of speaking, listening to the views of others, advocacy, argument, negotiation, compromise and teamwork could be practiced” (Davies et al., 2006, p. 2). Consistent with the above, in a study of the practice of learner democracy in four European countries (Denmark, Germany, The Netherlands and Sweden), Davies and Kirkpatrick (2000, p. 82) concluded that, “when pupils had a voice and were accorded value, the school was a happier place; when pupils are happy and given dignity, they attend more and they work more productively”. In summary the aforementioned studies revealed benefits of democracy in schools.

In his support for learner participation, Holmes (2006) focused on the link between learner participation and increase in achievement. He suggests that motivation and learning behaviour improve directly with an increase in learner participation. Learner participation improves motivation by allowing schools to be responsive to children’s physiological needs. These needs include providing a safe, less disruptive learning environment; creating a sense of belonging within the school; and giving young people a sense of responsibility and self-esteem. These features “allow children to be comfortable enough inside school to concentrate on their learning” (Holmes, 2006, p. 45). From Holmes’s (2006) explanation it can be concluded that learner participation

influences learner motivation and self-esteem, which impacts on learner attainment. An important feature of democratic schools is increased learner participation.

The Children's Research Centre on behalf of the Working Group conducted research on Student Councils in Second Level Schools in Ireland. The study was conducted in two phases. Phase one was aimed at describing "barriers, enablers and supports to the development and operation" of learner councils in Ireland (Keogh & Whyte, 2005, p. 5). Phase two focused on three "Good Practice Models of Student Councils" (ibid.). Participants referred to the advantages of having student councils. These included a positive school atmosphere and a caring school environment. In some schools student participation was reported to positively influence issues such as discipline, bullying and staff-student relations. "It was also reported that the student council provided students with educational opportunities and an interactive learning environment" (Keogh & Whyte, 2005, p. 122).

Similar findings on learner participation in schools were revealed in Wilson's (2009) case study in a secondary school on the south coast of England. The wide range of benefits included gaining respect, enjoyment, finding out how the school functions, teamwork and working more closely with teachers. According to Keogh & Whyte (2005) factors that contributed to the development and functioning of the learner council included regular meetings, agendas that were led by the learners, support from the principal and on-going training and evaluation. Main challenges were lack of time, lack of feedback and action from the management on the suggestions from the council and lack of support from the learners and teachers. The aforementioned studies bring to the fore the crucial role of learner councils and learner participation in democratic schools. It is evident that learner councils have merits and play a pivotal role in the democratization of schools. However, Harber (2010, p. 35) points out that genuine learner "participation in school is still a comparatively rare phenomenon internationally", and schools need to provide learners with opportunities to participate in significant issues related to the curriculum, teaching and learning.

### **3.3 Why democracy in schools?**

Davidoff and Lazarus (2002) acknowledge that although there is a trend to



democratize our schools in South Africa through policies like the *South African Schools Act 84 of 1996*, this process of democratization is evident in only a minority of schools. They further argue that few schools were able to shift away from the rigid authoritarianism that characterized South African culture. Van Vollenhoven, Beckmann and Blignaut (2006) also concluded that democracy is being suppressed in South African schools since the right to freedom of expression, as a core right in a democracy, is not currently nurtured. We are thus faced with the challenge of developing our schools in the context of our commitment to democracy. Expanding on the preceding argument Harber and Serf (2006) point out that in South Africa there is growing concern about the support for democracy from the public particularly with regard to establishing democracy as a permanent system of government. It is for this reason that they (Harber & Serf, 2006) feel that formal education plays a crucial role in supporting and promoting democracy amongst its future citizens. In addition Mabovula (2009, p. 231) affirms that, “one of the best places to give democracy true meaning is in a democratic school environment”. For democracy to thrive learners need to participate in democratic education (Engel, 2008; Gallagher, 2008; Hess & Johnson, 2010).

Dobozy (2007, p. 117) elaborates that, “educating tomorrow’s citizens in acquiring necessary attitudes and skills to function” in a democracy requires the simultaneous democratization of schools themselves. The experience of democracy in organizations is vital in nurturing democracy as well as developing and sustaining a democratic society (Woods & Gronn, 2009). It can therefore be argued that if learners enact the principles of democracy in school it is likely that they will transfer these principles in their after-school life that is, into society thus ensuring that the ideals of democracy are perpetuated. Taking the preceding argument further, Apple and Beane (2007) maintain that schools in a democratic society have a moral and social commitment to promote democracy and the democratic way of life. Giroux (1989) adds that public schools need to be defined as democratic public spheres and Noddings (2011, p. 5) points out that there is a need “to create schools that will serve as incubators of democracy”.

Mosher (1994, as cited in Wallin, 2003) captures the essence of the aforementioned arguments by stating that there are three fundamental reasons for learners engaging in

democratic experiences in schools. Firstly, Mosher (1994) maintains that learners who have first hand experience in democratic self-governance are more likely to comprehend and value democracy as well as develop necessary skills essential for effective democratic citizenship. This reasoning is in line with the preceding arguments. Secondly, democratic education is an essential stimulus for holistic human development incorporating cognitive, social, political and moral development. Thirdly, democratic school governance offers the means to enhance the school's moral culture. This would also imply developing a democratic school ethos and Trafford (2008) refers to openness, warmth and respect as elements of a democratic school ethos.

At this point I must emphasize that numerous scholars (Carr, 2008b; Loflin, 2008; Engel, 2008; Dewey, 1916; Meier, 2003; Harber, 2004; Aspin, 1995; Kelly, 1995; Wallin, 2003; Apple & Beane, 2007) have convergent ideas regarding the correlation between education and democracy. They have also made philosophical and theoretical claims in their impassioned defence for more democratic schools. However, the relationship between democratic schools and democratic societies is complex. It can even be argued that the evidence base with regard to democratic schools producing democratic societies is lacking. With this in mind I refer to Goodlad, Mantle-Bromley and Goodlad (2004, p. 45) who argue that democratic schooling does not guarantee a democratic society. However, they go on to add that a nation cannot uphold for long a democratic society without some form of democratic schooling. In other words, democratic schools are more likely rather than less likely to contribute to democratic societies. Gallagher (2008) succinctly brings the aforementioned arguments together by stating that schools will not promote democracy if they are not run democratically. Sen (1999, as cited in Woods & O' Hair, 2009) aptly argues that even though democracy may be interpreted and practised in different ways, with varying degrees of sincerity in a wide- range of contexts, developing democratic citizens is an essential aim for schools.

### **3.4 Democratic schools and democratic principles**

In advancing democratic schools, it is essential to refer to conventional schools (Morrison, 2008; O'Hair et al., 2000), also known as traditional schools (Dobozy, 2007; Barr, 2007; Williams, Cate & O'Hair, 2009). Mncube and Harber (2010) also

refer to traditional schooling. I am of the opinion that the terms conventional schools and traditional schools can be used interchangeably, and the reason for providing discussion on these schools is centred largely on my argument that in moving a school towards becoming democratic, we need to know about conventional school practices, where we are as an institution, and where we would like to move our school. Thus our point of departure should be traditional or conventional schools that were very much in evidence in the apartheid era in South Africa. Traditional school structures were arranged into hierarchies with top-down leadership that tended to isolate teachers (Williams et al., 2009), and often resulted in teachers working in isolation. Barr (2007) takes this argument further by stating that traditional schools maintain hierarchical relationships between learners and teachers and even among teachers themselves. Conventional schools are centred on the traditional top-down heroic approaches to leadership.

O'Hair et al. (2000) focus specifically on the roles and responsibilities in conventional schools, and maintain that the principal in a conventional school is the primary decision maker and is directly or indirectly responsible for everything that happens in the school. He/she is required to manage as well as lead the school. With this in mind, teachers in conventional schools generally view the principal as having little direct effect on the daily happenings in the classroom. Traditional schools are characterized by a one-way, teacher-centred, anti-dialogical approach to teaching and learning (Taylor & Robinson, 2009). The instructional practice is, to a large extent, the lecture style or what I term 'chalk and talk' by the teacher. In addition, the teacher's role in the classroom is that of knowledge-giver (Williams et al., 2009) and Steyn et al. (2004, p. 76) refers to this as "the information transmission approach to teaching". Learners are merely passive recipients of knowledge and are expected to submissively conform to what adults know is best for them. This is similar to Freire's (2003, p. 72) 'banking' concept of education, where the learners are the "depositories and the teacher is the depositor". The learners merely "receive, memorize and repeat" what they have learnt (Freire, 2003, p. 72). With regard to school governance, learners are seldom given a legitimate role in this aspect (Aspin, 1995; O'Hair et al., 2000). Moreover, from a traditional perspective parents are viewed as merely providing assistance rather than as a source of leadership or being part of governance.

Having provided discussion on conventional schools, I move on to democratic schools. It is evident from the preceding chapter that democratic education has direct links to democratic schools, universities and other places of learning. Tse (2009) underscores that under the umbrella term democratic school(ing) there are related notions. Some of these include democratic education, equal educational opportunities and democratic or human rights school. Tse (2009) argues that these terms point to or emphasize different aspects of democratic schooling. Various scholars (Dewey, 1916; Mncube, 2005; Mncube, 2009b; Loflin, 2008; Miller, 2007; Morrison, 2008; Hess & Johnson, 2010) refer to the centrality of schooling to democratic education. In defining democracy in the previous chapter I claimed that democracy is a way of living. Consistent with this definition, a democratic school with its emphasis on democracy will embody a democratic way of life. I argue that a democratic way of life will revolve around democratic principles. Democracy can be viewed as the embodiment of principles (Adams & Waghid, 2005; Mncube et al., 2011), and as such democratic schools are founded on as well as reflect democratic principles (Kelly, 1995; Mncube & Harber, 2010; Kensler, 2010). Thus, in creating democratic schools it is necessary to implement and reinforce the principles of democracy as they guide a democratic way of life.

Consistent with the notion of a democratic way of life, Steyn et al. (2004, p. 18) refer to a “democratic life style”. Kelly (1995) adds that anyone who proclaims adherence to democracy has to be committed to its principles. Essentially, “for democracy to succeed it is imperative that its basic qualities or principles not only be kept intact, but also nurtured” (Adams & Waghid, 2005, p. 26). To summarize, I state succinctly that democratic schools facilitate the expression of democratic principles, which are enacted in the daily lives of individuals in school. Although in transforming a school from less democratic to more democratic it is essential to move beyond the abstract to the application of principles to inform practice, an understanding of these democratic principles will also influence democratic practices.

Kelly (1995) refers to the basic principles of education in a democratic society that are of significance to democratic schools, which include human rights, equality to entitlement, openness in the face of knowledge, individual autonomy and empowerment. However, like Beane and Apple (1999), Kelly (1995) echoes the idea

pertaining to the need for faith in individuals. He points out that, “faith in the potentiality of humankind” underpins all the principles of education (Kelly, 1995, pp. 104-105). Dewey (1939), as mentioned, viewed democracy in association with faith in the potential of human nature. It is with this faith, which is a positive view of human nature, that the aforementioned principles as well as a democratic society can be realized. Without faith in human nature the other principles will be meaningless. Beane and Apple (1999) refer to democratic faith, which is the underlying belief that democracy has significant meaning; it is doable and essential if we are to ensure freedom and human dignity. Drawing from Kelly’s (1995) as well as Beane and Apple’s (1999) assertion, I believe that having faith in the potential of each individual will assist in a school becoming more democratic.

Kensler (2010) refers to ten democratic principles within schools: purpose and vision, dialogue and listening, integrity, accountability, choice, individual and collective, decentralization, transparency, fairness and dignity, reflection and evaluation. Mncube and Harber (2010) state that democratic schools generally exhibit the following characteristics of democracy: rights of individuals, equity, participation and informed choice. Gore (2002) captures some of the democratic principles outlined by Kensler (2010) and Mncube and Harber (2010), but expands on others to include inclusive consultation and collaboration, equality of opportunity in representation, freedom for critical reflection and a focus on the common good. Similarly, Aspin (1995) in his reference to democratic principles includes equality, freedom, tolerance, respect and consideration of other people’s interests.

Beane and Apple (1999, p. 10) explain that, “Democratic schools, like democracy itself do not happen by chance. They result from explicit attempts ... to put in place arrangements and opportunities that will bring democracy to life”. These arrangements and opportunities incorporate two lines of work. The first involves creating democratic structures and processes by which life in the school is carried out; and the second involves creating a curriculum that will give young people democratic experiences (Beane & Apple, 1999). They add that the conditions on which democracy is dependent are also fundamental concerns of democratic schools. These conditions include an open flow of ideas so that individuals are informed, faith in the potential of individuals to find solutions to problems, being able to critically reflect on

issues, and being concerned about the dignity, welfare and rights of others as well as the common good. However, most important is the promotion and extension of the democratic way of life. These characteristics overlap and display commonalities with some of the principles outlined in the preceding paragraphs.

Drawing from the democratic principles outlined, I will focus on the following principles, each of which will be discussed within the context of democratic schools: purpose and vision; collaboration, consultation and communication; participation and shared decision-making; accountability; transparency and openness; informed choice; rights of individuals; integrity and trust; critical thinking; common good; interconnectedness of the community; respect; and equality and equity.

Sears and Hughes (2005) explain that democratic principles and ideas are both complex and fluid and may be interpreted differently. This implies that the way democratic principles are implemented requires deliberation (Lefrançois & Ethier, 2010). It is for this reason I explore each democratic principle; however these principles overlap and are thus interrelated. I argue that a democratic school can be defined as a school that shares most or even all of the principles outlined.

### **3.4.1 Purpose and vision**

It is necessary for every school to have a clear sense of shared purpose and vision as it brings to the fore the *raison d'être* for the very existence of the organization. The vision of the school is the specific path for the school chosen by all role players. Although this may be an ideal, this shared vision brings about a sense of collective commitment. Without a vision, it is easy to lose sight of the purpose of school (Davidoff & Lazarus, 2002). Thus it is essential to have a shared vision, which articulates common or shared values as it contributes towards an enhanced sense of purpose, a sense of ownership and commitment towards its accomplishment. This in turn creates synergy and influences collective action.

It is also crucial to consider the purpose within the overall vision of the school. Davidoff and Lazarus (2002) caution that it is difficult to realize a vision that is centred on one person's ideal. It is for this reason that O'Hair et al. (2000) underscore the need for a collective identity in democratic school communities. However,

Kensler (2008) points out that it is essential for individuals to understand the unique contribution they make towards the realization of collective goals. Fullan (2003, as cited in Kensler, 2010) posits that the vision and purpose should be operational throughout the system so as to bring about coherence. Jenlink and Jenlink (2008) intimate that what makes a school democratic is bound in part by a common purpose, which is democracy. This accentuates the idea that democracy does not just happen; rather, it is created through experiences shared by all role players.

### **3.4.2 Collaboration, consultation and communication**

It follows that living out a shared vision, which in effect is a shared responsibility, requires collaboration (O’Hair et al., 2000). Collaboration is the foundation of democracy itself (Apple & Beane, 2007). Thus democratic schools seek ways to work together with all stakeholders to make decisions. Gore (2002) maintains that collaboration is closely associated with consultation. Although Gore (2002) makes reference to inclusive consultation, Lefrançois and Ethier (2010) emphasize that inclusiveness can be difficult as certain individuals may be incapable of participating due to lack of information or education, while others may exclude themselves voluntarily due to lack of interest or time.

Pendlebury and Enslin (2004) elaborate that under pretence of inclusion or a naïve or perhaps a limited understanding of it, groups who were previously excluded may be brought into the deliberation process but continue to be silenced or disregarded. Gore (2002) refers to the importance of open communication, which is about connecting with all individuals in the school community. Democracy, which requires people, thrives on communication and more specifically on the open exchange of views (Gibson, 2009; Bäckman & Trafford, 2007; Kensler, 2010; Wolk, 1998; Chamberlin, 1989). Goodlad et al. (2004, p. 93) aptly state that democracy is based on the idea that, “we each have a voice and that every voice counts”.

It follows that in democratic schools there must be discussion, with emphasis on dialogue and listening. Steyn et al. (2004) elaborate that listening is an important element in communication, and a willingness to hear is essential. Wasonga (2009, p. 209) adds that, “listening to other voices demonstrates a conscious understanding of the significant value of others”. Taking the preceding arguments further, Kensler

(2010) refers to dialogue and listening as a democratic principle that advances effective conversation and establishes new levels of meaning and connection. Conversation “is any interactive spoken exchange between two or more people” (Pridham, 2001, p. 2). During dialogue individuals are exposed to new possibilities that may emerge during their conversation. Dialogue represents the medium of interaction among and between individuals (O’Donnell, 2004). It is dialogue that facilitates consultation and collaboration (Taylor & Robinson, 2009). Freire (2003, pp. 92-93) adds that, “Without dialogue there can be no communication”. Moreover, Steyn et al. (2004) refer to democratic communication and De Nobile (2007) explains that communication that involves participation in decision-making may be referred to as democratic communication.

November et al. (2010) expound that nurturing a culture of communication in schools implies opening up channels of dialogue - again emphasizing the role of dialogue. In essence, democracy will only take root if there is free dialogue and discussion on any issue (Steyn et al., 2004). It is important to note that dialogue is not about changing the views of individuals. Instead it is about realizing that opinions and truths of others can contribute to “a collective truth” (Zaiss, 2002, p. 88). Discussion, on the other hand, allows for the introduction of perspectives held by others (Baker & Shalit, 2008). Merritt and McCombs (2004) warn against using the words discussion, debate, dialogue and deliberation interchangeably and add that discussion may not necessarily involve a disagreement. Rather, it is viewed as a conversation involving exchange of ideas among two or more individuals. Debate, on the other hand, is a discussion that involves challenging the views of others and persuading individuals towards your point of view. However, deliberation entails “careful weighing of choices and consequences, consideration of others’ concerns and thinking about possible alternatives” (Merritt & McCombs, 2004, p. 4). Essentially deliberation, dialogue and discussion are essential to democracy.

Participation and decision-making are interconnected with collaboration, consultation and communication and will be discussed as another democratic principle.

### **3.4.3 Participation and shared decision-making**

With the advent of democracy in the RSA it was imperative to transform schools into



democratic institutions. This move to transform schools culminated in the decentralization of decision-making powers from national, provincial and district to school site level. Democratic schools accentuate the idea of widespread participation, thus placing emphasis on inclusion of all stakeholders (Beane & Apple, 1999). Participation has a direct bearing on shared decision-making, and both these concepts are central to democratic life. Various authors (Furman & Starratt, 2002; Dürr, 2005; Lansdown, 2001; Chamberlin, 1989) refer to the term democratic participation.

In defining democratic participation Hart (1992, as cited in Frank & Huddleston, 2009) assert that it means being part of the decisions that influence your life, the life of the community and the society in which you live. Furman and Starratt (2002) underscore that establishing a forum for democratic participation is not sufficient. Instead, it “requires the ability to listen, understand, empathize, negotiate, speak, debate and resolve conflicts in a spirit of interdependence and working for the common good” (Furman & Starratt, 2002, p. 118). Joubert (2009) affirms the preceding assertion that effective participation requires debate, argument, compromise, decision-making and accountability. In democratic schools individuals in the school community participate in the decisions that affect their lives, thus accentuating shared decision-making. Essentially shared decision-making is the inclusion of others in the process. Instead of merely implementing decisions taken unilaterally, democratic schools advance shared decision-making, where the emphasis is on the school community collectively deciding on issues as opposed to hierarchical decision-making practices which hinder dialogue and communication among all stakeholders. Springate and Lindridge (2010, p. 125) add that, “a school is only democratic when all those involved have a voice in decision-making both in principle and practice, and are prepared to listen to each other”. Based on the foregoing statements, this would imply that the decision-making structure becomes flatter and more open.

At this point I must draw attention to the fact that there are differences in debates relating to children’s and adults’ participation in decision-making. In defending children’s participation in decision-making, Lansdown (2001) maintains that children’s participation enhances decision-making as children have experience and knowledge that is relevant to their situation. Their experiences provide them with

views and ideas specific to their context. Moreover, shared decision-making encourages ownership of the decisions and will facilitate the implementation of decisions. This is further substantiated by Harber (1997a), who is of the opinion that rules are better kept by learners and teachers if they are democratically agreed to. However, Myers (2008) adds another point that participation in shared decision-making empowers the individuals involved in the process.

Elaborating on the idea of shared decision-making, Rizvi (1992) asserts that democratization of schools means the democratization of communication and social relations. This involves decisions about problems and how to solve them on the basis of collective inputs. Decision-making about issues such as knowledge, pedagogy and evaluation must be devolved to the local school level. This would imply that people should be provided with opportunities to ‘own’ what goes on in schools. Besides, including learners in decision-making gives them a sense of belonging and a voice, which in turn enhances healthy relationships between learners, teachers and others in the school community (Neigel, 2006). Whitty and Wisby (2007, p. 5) are of the opinion that learner voice “can lead to better school performance, whether in terms of behaviour, engagement or attainment”. In addition, Whitty and Wisby (2007) as well as Fletcher (2004, p. 29) assert that meaningful participation by learners contributes to “strengthening their commitment to education, community and democracy”.

Consistent with the preceding argument, Beane and Apple (1999) elaborate that in a democratic school all those involved in the school, including the learners, have the right to participate in the decision-making process. Children have a right to express their views and to have their views considered especially in decisions that affect them. During shared decision-making this fundamental human right is accentuated. Thus learner voice is located within this notion of shared decision-making and in effect has implications for democratic school governance. Although in principle almost any aspect of school life allows for learner participation, in practice participation varies as to whether it involves simply expressing opinions or having actual decision-making powers or responsibilities (Frank & Huddleston, 2009). Holmes (2006) elaborates that a school has a high level of learner participation if it sincerely considers the learners’ opinions when making decisions in a manner that is transparent and accessible to all learners.

Lansdown (2001) responds to four arguments against children's participation. The first argument is that "children lack competence or experience to participate" in shared decision-making (Lansdown, 2001, p. 8). In response to this reasoning Lansdown (2001) contends that provided children have adequate support and relevant information they can participate in issues concerning them. I also argue that although participation in decision-making requires various skills like listening skills and skills in deliberation, children can be taught these skills from a very early age. According to the second argument against children's participation in shared decision-making, before children are granted rights they must learn responsibility. However, an effective way of encouraging this responsibility involves respecting the rights of the child. The third argument is based on the notion that, "Giving children rights to be heard will take away their childhood" (Lansdown, 2001, p. 8). In response to this argument it must be pointed out that children make choices from a very early age and as such are involved in decision-making. Finally, it is believed that allowing children to participate in shared decision-making with adults will result in a lack of respect for parents (Lansdown, 2001). Contrary to this idea listening to children involves respecting them and inculcating the value to respect others.

It is evident that there are arguments for and against children and adults' participation in decision-making. Rubin and Silva (2003, as cited in Lin, 2008) advises that inclusion of the learners' voice requires offering learners realistic space and time to be included in the process of decision-making. Moreover, learners need to be provided with the necessary skills. Nevertheless, I argue that it is only logical to include the learners who are key stakeholders in the school in decision-making as it is their right and ultimately the decisions made will directly affect them.

Expanding on this idea of learner participation, Hart (1992, as cited in Whitty & Wisby, 2007) proposed a ladder of participation (Figure 3.1) that represents various levels or extent of participation. However, at one end the levels one, two and three does not constitute participation. Levels four, five, six and seven reflect varying degrees of participation, and at level eight learners initiate the process and invite adults to join them in decision-making. Hart's (1992) ladder of learner participation can be applied to democratic school governance, and Mabovula (2008) affirms this notion.

<i>Degrees Of participation</i>	Child-initiated, shared decisions with adults 8
	Child-initiated and directed 7
	Adult-initiated, shared decisions with children 6
	Consulted and informed 5
	Assigned but informed 4
<i>Non-participation</i>	Tokenism 3
	Decoration 2
	Manipulation 1

Figure 3.1: Ladder of learner participation (Hart, 1992, as cited in Whitty & Wisby, 2007).

Although the preceding discussion emphasizes shared decision-making, Bäckman and Trafford (2007) contend that the inclusion of individuals in decision-making doesn't always have to be achieved through formal meetings. Furthermore, decisions do not have to be reduced to the process of voting. Instead, where the individuals tend to be committed to shared principles and purposes, consensus is often reached through discussion. The RCL and SGBs are structures that provide opportunities for learners to have a voice in decision-making in schools. Kluth (2005) appositely mentions that the voices of all stakeholders should be honoured and their contributions valued.

#### 3.4.4 Accountability

Democracy requires some form of accountability in the school. Accountability is inextricably linked to concepts such as participation, decentralization, empowerment and transparency (Maile, 2002). Thus Bezzina (1997, as cited in Beckmann & Blom, 2000) underscores that accountability is an essential element of democracy. Accountability means having to answer to others both junior and senior to oneself for one's actions (Beckmann & Blom, 2000), and particularly the results of those actions (Møller, 2009). Maile (2002) enunciates the aforementioned statement by asserting

that accountability involves reporting to other stakeholders voluntarily or compulsorily. Within the context of this study, the preceding arguments imply that principals who are public officials are accountable for their decisions and actions. The SASA emphasizes accountability to the parents and learners as well. However, it must be noted that the school is also accountable to the community for its decisions, policies and actions. Davidoff and Lazarus (2002) explain that accountability that functions in one direction only (e.g. a top-down hierarchical management structure or even a bottom-up approach) will not advance the aims of democracy. Maile (2002) aptly summarizes that accountability should be regarded as a fundamental element of school governance.

### **3.4.5 Transparency and openness**

The principle of accountability is linked to transparency (Maile, 2002). Essentially transparency is the creation of openness and access for others to see what is going on (McQuoid-Mason, Mchunu, Govender, O' Brien & Larkin, 1994). Hoy and Tschannen-Moran (2003) state that openness involves the sharing of information, thus implying that openness infers the extent to which information is withheld from others. Democratic schools need to be open and transparent. This is further articulated by Collinson and Cook (2007) who posit that societies that embrace and embed democratic principles are characterized by openness to knowledge, diversity and change. However, November et al. (2010) purport that communication is essential for transparency and building consensus. This enhances a culture of openness and interaction as well as participation of all stakeholders in school meetings and debates. Kelly (1995) suggests that it is also important to ensure openness in the face of human knowledge, as it is essential for a democratic society and for the continued progress of human understanding. This will entail challenging understandings and adopting a questioning approach to knowledge.

In her discussion of the principle of transparency, Kensler (2010) refers to the need to share information freely. She (Kensler, 2010) adds that although information should flow freely throughout the system, information flows into and out of the system are just as important. Davidoff and Lazarus (2002) purport that schools that are attempting to establish a democratic ethos should focus on access to appropriate information as it contributes to establishing transparency in schools. Finally, Steyn et

al. (2004) emphasize that transparency with regard to issues concerning learners will assure them of sincere as well as equitable treatment.

### **3.4.6 Informed choice**

Sears and Hughes (2005) underscore that a commitment to democracy is essentially a question of choice; it is a choice of the principles that are to direct the ways of associated living, and in the institutions, policies and practices that influence our daily interactions. With this in mind, Kensler (2010) appropriately states that the democratic principle of choice refers to individuals having the opportunity to make choices about issues that directly affect them. Carr and Hartnett (1997) purport that in a democracy individuals do not only articulate their own preferences, they also make public and collective choices associated with the common good of society. Making choices requires open access to relevant information. If only a handful of individuals have access to important information with regard to particular issues, then generally it is only these individuals who can make informed decisions on these. There is therefore a need to share information responsibly and freely with all stakeholders.

### **3.4.7 Rights of individuals**

It is difficult to conceive of a democracy without established rights (Knight, 2001). Dahl (2000, as cited in Snauwaert, 2002) asserts that democracy is a system of rights founded on the logic of equality and the basic idea of freedom as enshrined in the concept of human rights (Quraishi, 2007). The South African Constitution (RSA, 1996a) includes a well-established Bill of Rights that emphasizes an array of rights, including freedom to basic education, freedom of expression, freedom of religion, belief and opinion. Van Vollenhoven et al. (2006) contend that the right to freedom of expression is seen as a pillar of democracy since it is viewed as a core right in a democracy.

With regard to education as a human right, education is seen as an obligation by the State (Kelly, 1995). In other words, the State should ensure that every individual, through education, is prepared for participation in society. Thus education can be viewed as a basic human right, as an entitlement of every child. Kelly (1995) adds that all learners should have an equal right to appropriate educational provision. Democratic schooling recognizes the value and rights of each individual and

“promotes the idea that every child should have the right to express an opinion, and to have that opinion taken into account, in any matter or procedure affecting the child” (Nugent & Mooney, 2008, p. 2). Simply stated democratic schools view learners as citizens with rights and responsibilities.

### **3.4.8 Integrity and trust**

Individual as well as collective integrity are characteristics of democratic communities (Kensler, 2010). Kensler (2008) adds that integrity involves individuals steadfastly adhering to high moral principles. Collinson (2008, p. 449) explains that, “when individuals’ or organizations’ words are predictably consistent with constructive actions, others recognize them as having integrity”. Integrity is an important component of trust and the bedrock of collaboration (Bryk & Schneider, 2003). I believe that integrity promotes trust, and Grant et al. (2010) emphasize the need to develop mutual trust. Bryk and Schneider (2003, p. 40) refer to relational trust that is built through “day-to-day social exchanges in a school community”. They add that collective decision-making is facilitated through strong relational trust. It follows that establishing integrity and trust are essential in democratic schools.

### **3.4.9 Critical thinking**

I am of the opinion that critical thinking is integral to democracy. According to Sardoc (2003, as cited in Dürr, 2005) critical thinking is a precondition for participating in democratic processes. Following the same line of thought various authors (Frank & Huddleston, 2009; Van Vollenhoven et al., 2006; Steyn et al., 2004) posit that the existence of democracy is dependent on individuals who are articulate and who can think critically. In other words a democracy requires critical thinkers. Ten Dam and Volman (2004, p. 360) elaborate that, “critical thinking is a crucial aspect in the competence citizens need to participate in ... a democratic society” and it is critical thinking that enables citizens to contribute to society. It follows that democratic schools aim at developing learners into critical thinkers (Beane & Apple, 1999; Inman & Burke, 2002; Bryan & Hayes, 2010; Mncube & Harber, 2010).

The various definitions of critical thinking that follow eloquently express the need for critical thinking in a democracy and as such in a democratic school.

However, Lipman (2003, p. 61) distinguishes between critical thinking and critical thinkers. The former implies a “manner of thought” and the latter refers to a “type of thinker”. Halpern (1997, p. 4) contends that critical thinking “is used to describe thinking that is purposeful, reasoned, and goal directed...”. It is this type of thinking that is necessary in solving problems and formulating inferences. Paul (1992, p. 10) pertinently sums up that, “In critical thinking we make and shape ideas and experiences so that they may be used to structure and solve problems, frame decisions, and ... effectively communicate with others”. Paul (1992) maintains that finding solutions to problems involves critical thinking and this inextricable link between critical thinking and problem solving is echoed by Higgs and Higgs (2001). It can thus be stated that critical thinking involves individuals deliberately questioning their prejudices and assumptions, analyzing opinions and evaluating evidence logically and rationally to achieve new levels of understanding, and developing new attitudes and opinions of their own (Gurkaynak, 2004, as cited in Frank & Huddleston, 2009). In essence critical thinking involves reasoning, presenting arguments with regards to ones views and opinions as well as considering alternative views.

Within a democratic classroom critical thinking and the skills of discussion and debate, including advocacy, argument and negotiation, can be developed in almost any learning area (Frank & Huddleston, 2009). However, Van Vollenhoven et al. (2006) assert that in developing and encouraging critical and independent thinking it is essential to enhance and respect freedom of expression. Similarly, Steyn et al. (2004) point out that a critical thinker displays openness, and appreciates and respects the beliefs and views expressed by others. This means that with regard to critical thinking democratic principles of participation, openness and respect are necessary.

#### **3.4.10 Common good**

Etzioni (2004, p. 1) believes that the common good is a “self-evident concept” which refers to the “public interest” and is considered “the right thing to do, by itself, for itself”. It is viewed as a good to be nourished. Quraishi (2007), on the other hand, purports that the common good is concerned with both the public and private responsibilities of an individual and groups towards one another with regard to their rights. This includes mutual respect and recognition of each other’s rights. For



Dewey (1916), the concern for the common good was the responsibility of all individuals in a democratic community. Schoeman (2006) points out that it is important for individuals to deliberate on the nature of the public good and how to achieve it.

#### **3.4.11 Interconnectedness of the community**

Schools are indelibly linked to the communities in which they are located (Goodlad et al., 2004). Extending this argument, Frank and Huddleston (2009) contend that democracy involves relating to others in the community, implying that there is some form of engagement with the community. The school's relationship with its wider community and the individuals and organizations that are part of the community is a crucial source of democratic education. Frank and Huddleston (2009, p. 22) elaborate that when schools connect "with the community around them a unique 'public space' is created, where all the stakeholders of the school are able to come together" over issues of common interests. Thus opportunities for democratic participation are created. With this in mind, democratic schools engage more closely in the life of their wider communities and as such foster school-community relationships. Schools need to see themselves as "part of a larger community with the emphasis on cooperation and collaboration" (Mncube & Harber, 2010, p. 617).

Kluth (2005) explains that in democratic schools learners are not only connected to each other, but to the immediate neighborhood and wider community. This could be through joint ventures with businesses or even of volunteer associations with organizations. Basically democratic schools view themselves as being part of the community, and extending this notion I am of the opinion that there should be a mutual relationship between the school and community. Furthermore, the principal should ensure adequate lines of communication between the school and the community (Botha, 2010).

#### **3.4.12 Respect**

Democratic education is based upon mutual respect and trust and is often seen as liberating both teachers and learners (Dworkin, Saha & Hill, 2003). Democracies advance a belief that all human beings possess an equal inherent dignity or worth (Snauwaert, 2002). Respect for fundamental human rights and the inherent dignity of

all individuals are essential to the school culture and the democratic society we envision. Basically the aforementioned assertion implies that individuals should be treated with respect and dignity. Schoeman (2005) posits that respecting others includes listening to their opinions, behaving in a civil manner, taking into consideration the rights and interests of fellow citizens, and adhering to the principle of majority rule, but also acknowledging the right of the minority to differ. Hence respect is a necessary precondition for communication and teamwork (DoE, 2001; Mabovula, 2008). There is also a need for mutual respect between teachers and parents as well as between teachers and learners (Dworkin et al., 2003; DoE, 2001).

#### **3.4.13 Equality and equity**

O’Hair et al. (2000) as well as Mncube et al. (2011) argue that equity refers to seeking fair and just practices with regard to individuals and groups. This means that all individuals in a democratic school should be treated fairly. With regard to equality, Arnesson (2001), as cited in Herrera (2007, p. 323), posits that equality is associated with the idea that, “everyone shall have the same”. Thus a commitment to democratic forms of social living involves maintaining equality (Kelly, 1995). Quraishi (2007) asserts that equality, which underpins democracy, involves equal opportunity and equal access to resources. MacMath (2008), on the other hand, purports that equality is centred on the belief that everyone is equal, and this includes learners. She (MacMath, 2008) adds that learner voices are equal to that of their teachers. Bennis and Graves (2007) take this notion further by stating that democratic schools generally centre around shared decision-making among the learners and staff, with emphasis on equality among staff and learners.

Having discussed democratic principles which are central to democratic schools, I point out that with there being no precise definition of democratic schools, various authors (MacBeath, 2004; Tse, 2009; Trafford, 2008) have outlined their characteristics. Bennis and Graves (2007) outline characteristics that have been discussed, but of significance is the notion of a learner-centred approach to learning in which learners choose their daily activities.

Tse (2000, as cited in Dworkin et al., 2003) corroborates the above understanding of democratic schools but elaborates on other relevant characteristics, which includes the

non-authoritarian and non-bureaucratic management by the principal. There is full representation of teachers and learners on the school council or school board and an emphasis on parents as partners in the educative process. Miller (1995), as cited in O'Brien (2006), adds another dimension by focusing on accommodating diverse learning styles and engaged, relevant, socially responsible learning. MacBeath (2004) outlines four basic characteristics of democratic schools that capture the similarity in those put forth by the authors above. The first characteristic revolves around relationships and how we treat and value each other. This idea is further espoused by Steyn et al. (2004), who contend that sound interpersonal relations are necessary for a democratic society and as such democratic schools should nurture healthy personal relations. Higgs (1995, as cited in Steyn et al., 2004, p. 82), succinctly adds that, "The relationships in democratic education are participative, reciprocal, non-repressive and non-discriminatory". The second characteristic according to MacBeath (2004) is concerned with equal value of all people, irrespective of gender and background. This is linked to the third characteristic, which involves respect and understanding of differences between people. The fourth and final characteristic, is grounded in the rights and responsibilities in a democratic society.

O'Hair et al. (2000) refer to the practices of democratic schools as including shared value systems, authentic pedagogy, critical study, shared decision-making, internal and external support and a moral and professional community. Harber (2006) in his discussion of democratic schools states that one of the reasons why a democratic school is a more effective school lies with its internal organization and management. He argues that rules, if democratically agreed by staff, will be upheld. With regard to the teaching and learning in such a situation, he emphasizes that it is characterized by a variety of teaching methods, which includes discussion.

At this juncture I point out that without discussion on democratic citizenship education the exposition of democratic schools and democratic principles would be incomplete. I argue that democratic citizenship education can be viewed together with education in and for democracy. With this reasoning I refer to Tse (2009) who appositely maintains that one of the primary aims of contemporary public schooling is citizenship education. Similarly, Schoeman (2006, p. 132) contends that in a democracy citizenship education is a necessity and as such cites Barber (1992):

... the competence to participate in democratic communities, the ability to think critically and act deliberately in a pluralistic world, the empathy that permit us to hear and thus accommodate others, all involve skills that must be acquired.

It follows that democratic citizenship education aims at equipping learners with the skills and knowledge to function in a democratic society and this would include knowledge about rights, responsibilities and roles of citizens. Stated simply democratic citizenship education is about democratic civic life. It follows that effective democratic citizenship education requires democratic schools that are committed to promoting and modeling democratic principles.

Finally, I believe that the interplay of democratic principles will influence democracy in the school and affirm that, “No matter what our schools are like, our responsibility ... is to help them become more democratic” (O’Hair et al., 2000, pp. 49-50). With this intent I now shift my focus to democratic school development.

### **3.5 Democratic school development**

Knight (2001) points out that a newer democracy begins with recognition that democracy is an unattainable ideal. Perry (2009), on the other hand, points out that educational systems in democratic countries are hardly ever completely democratic or undemocratic; instead they are more likely to demonstrate degrees of “democraticness” and continue to aspire to become as fully democratic as possible (Perry, 2009, p. 425). In other words the extent and intensity of commitment to democratic practice can vary (Young, 2000). Taking the preceding argument further, Bäckman and Trafford (2007, p. 6) purport that, “No democracy is perfect, no school is perfect and no school is perfectly democratic”. However, what is possible is significant movement towards an ideal (Knight, 2001). Thus a newer democracy is an ongoing process from less democratic to more democratic. O’Hair et al. (2000) argue that democratic schooling is a process rather than a static state that one attains, and schools need to continuously assess their practices and work towards becoming more democratic. This notion is illustrated in the Figure 3.2.

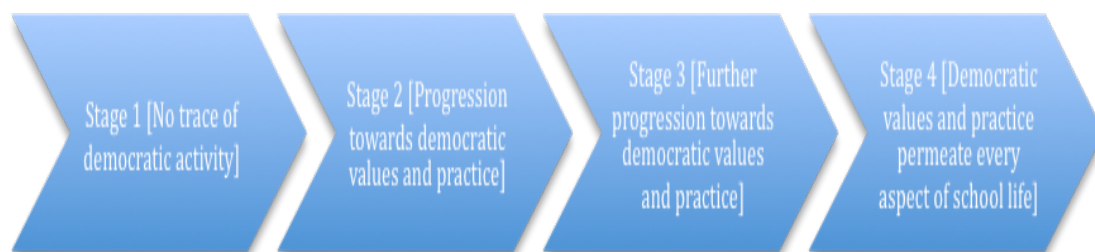


*Figure 3.2:* The ongoing process of moving a school from being less democratic to more democratic.

It would be an ideal belief that this process would basically be an upward trend towards becoming more democratic; in other words, moving a school towards becoming more democratic may not involve a simple linear progression. The illustration of this process on the spiral (Figure 3.2) clearly suggests that there could be times or situations that could result in the school becoming less democratic. However, after such experiences the school can resume its progress towards becoming more democratic. By more democratic I echo Frank and Huddleston's (2009) thoughts that this implies creating opportunities for democratic participation by all stakeholders, and as such schools need to be more participatory institutions where all individuals have a part to play. I extend this idea by stating that democratic participation contributes to the idea of democracy as a way of living. It is perhaps necessary to note that, "Democracy is an extremely difficult way of life to sustain" (Peters, 1966, p. 319), and Frank and Huddleston (2009) caution that democratic participation should not be reduced to merely establishing formal decision-making structures, which in South African schools will include the RCL and SGB. Instead, democratic participation should extend to encouraging individuals to feel they can take responsibility for what happens in the daily life of their school. I am of the

opinion that these democratic structures can play a crucial role in advancing democratic participation of stakeholders.

Bäckman and Trafford (2007) refer to four stages in democratic development that might be discernible in a school, from stage one where there is no trace of democratic activity to stage four, which (to them) is an advanced form of living. In their view stage one represents a school that has not begun the democratic path to any extent and advocates old, authoritarian values. Stage two represents initial attempts towards democratic values and practices. Stage three depicts further progression. However, at stage four democratic values and practices permeate every aspect of school life. An example is leadership at stage one in a school that is authoritarian, without consultation with regard to other stakeholders (Bäckman & Trafford, 2007). At stage two the leadership has some awareness of stakeholders and may inform others before applying decisions. At stage three there is incidental or informal discussion with others, where information is gathered and delivered randomly. Finally, at stage four there is both formal and informal consultation and the leadership works towards building consensus and trust. These stages are illustrated in Figure 3.3.



*Figure 3.3:* Bäckman and Trafford’s (2007) four stages of democratic development in school.

Although Bäckman and Trafford (2007) provide valuable insight into democratic development at schools, I argue that this development may not be as rigid as discussed as schools that are moving towards becoming more democratic may not necessarily progress systematically in these stages. These stages, although informative, tend to oversimplify what may actually occur in reality. Williams et al. (2009) also provide insight into steps in progressing from a traditional public school

to a professional learning community and finally to a democratic community. These steps, illustrated in Figure 3.4, can be represented along a continuum.



Figure 3.4: Progression from a traditional school to a learning community to a democratic community (Williams et al., 2009).

Williams et al. (2009) state that in a traditional school the leader determines what is shared and when it is shared and teaching is in isolation. However, through the creation of structures and practices such as establishing trust, critiquing practices, and development of a collaborative culture with emphasis on sharing of decisions, a traditional school moves towards becoming a professional learning community. In moving beyond a professional learning community to a democratic community, there is greater sharing of power, leadership and authority. Collective responsibility and action are key aspects. Stakeholders examine and act upon issues of equity and consider serving others both within and outside the school.

O’Hair et al. (2000) propose a framework for creating and maintaining democratic learning communities, known as the IDEALS - inquiry, discourse, equity, authenticity, leadership and service. This involves inquiring about practices, supporting discourse about learning, focusing on equity issues, making learning connections with the real world, sharing leadership and promoting service. In essence the IDEALS framework implies that those school communities practising elements of the framework will move progressively along a continuum towards a more democratic

learning community. Jenlink and Jenlink (2008) explain that when the activities of the school are directed by democratic ideals, the school becomes a democratically practiced place. Ginnis and Trafford (1995, p. 76) purport that the “degree of democracy in a school” can be determined through the answers provided to the following two questions: Who is included in the decision-making process? How are these individuals included in the decision-making process?

Having provided brief descriptions on advancing schools to become more democratic, Bäckman and Trafford (2007, pp. 16-17) state that,

Democracy is often described as a journey, and any school trying to plot its position along that journey will inevitably find that in some areas it has travelled a long way while in others it has barely started ... we should take heart from the successes and find renewed determination to tackle the areas that have not moved far enough.

Hence principals, in advancing their schools on the path to become more democratic, need to review the position of the school and focus on areas that will drive the school onward. Inman and Burke (2002, p. 73) concur that schools need to continuously “review their structures and practices in relation to whole school democratic practice”.

Although in Chapter One I argued for the crucial role of the principal in creating democratic schools, discussion in this chapter highlights the role of the principal, and hence I find it necessary to elaborate on the role of the principal in a democratic school.

### **3.6 Role of the principal in a democratic school**

Apple and Beane (2007) and Frank and Huddleston (2009) also stress the critical role of the principal in creating democratic schools. In particular, it is necessary to explore the ways in which principals exercise their authority and practice leadership in order to determine if their schools are democratic institutions and if they are, to what extent (Aspin, 1995). Aspin (1995) identifies several attributes associated with a democratically minded principal. Apple and Beane (2007) add that democratic schools have certain characteristics in common, and similarly principals in these democratic schools also have particular attributes in common. Firstly, it is argued that principals should be committed to creating and sustaining democratic schools (Apple



& Beane, 2007). It is this commitment that will drive him/her forward when faced with resistance from others. Of significance is Sears and Hughes' (2005) notion of the spirit of democracy, which they contend has two related parts. The first involves an individual understanding of and commitment to a set of ideas central to democracy, and the second is the disposition to function in a democratic way. Consistent with the preceding argument, Goldring and Greenfield (2002), as cited in Klinker (2006), point out that educational leaders have become increasingly aware of the relevance of leadership in ensuring quality education and a healthy democracy. However, Hess and Johnson (2010) found that creating and sustaining leadership that supports democratic practices depends not only on the philosophical orientation of the leader but also on the structures that have been put in place to advance democratic practice.

Secondly the principals, explain Apple and Beane (2007, p. 37), must have the "capacity for complexity". "Democracy can be rather messy. In a democratic school diversity of ideas is prized, discussion and debate is prolonged, and consensus is fragile" (Apple & Beane, 2007, p. 37). This would imply that principals in these schools would generally experience difficulties. Thirdly, principals in democratic schools need to have an understanding of culture. They need to know that democracy should permeate every aspect of school life, and this usually involves reculturing the school.

The fourth characteristic entails the ability to collaborate with the emphasis on 'us' and 'we' among all stakeholders. Collaboration is the foundation of democracy itself. Apple and Beane (2007, p. 37) explain that principals have an integral role because they are expected to lead the school and "whether they lead by control or by collaboration sets the tone for the school". Aspin (1995) adds that a democratically minded principal consults with the entire staff on issues concerning school. Discussions at regular meetings are encouraged and all stakeholders are encouraged to voice their opinions. When necessary, expert advice is sought to assist with the educational welfare of the school. The principal will assist in monitoring the decision-making process, ensuring that the agreed upon decisions are put into effect as well as evaluating the effectiveness of the decisions. Democratic schools encourage the participation of all stakeholders; thus the principal and staff can appoint senior learners to become involved in the day-to-day running of the school. At this juncture

it is important to note the assertion put forth by Rusch (1995, as cited in Williams et al., 2009) that principals in democratic schools engage in capacity building, which I believe implies developing the potential or capabilities of individuals.

The fifth characteristic is centred on patience and persistence. There are no quick-fix methods in moving a school towards becoming democratic. Instead, there may be long, drawn out processes involving collaboration and deliberation. Most importantly, the principal should be able to inspire his team and in doing so persuade these individuals to move with him in a particular direction (Steyn et al., 2004). In further support of the aforementioned argument, Frank and Huddleston (2009, p. 27) contend that unless principals are able to recognize the value of more democratic forms of organization and are keen to advance their schools along that path, “little real change is likely to take place”.

Having confidence in the mission is the sixth characteristic. Because democracy requires transparency, it is often fraught with problems, and bringing democracy to life in schools can become a real struggle. Therefore it is necessary for principals to be confident and true to the cause.

Dimmock (1995) maintains that leadership in democratic schools is about power sharing and empowering others to lead. In this way others can get involved in the school. Furthermore, a central concern of principals in building democratic schools is sincere care and respect for both the learners’ and teachers’ interests and welfare. Bryan and Hayes (2010) advise that creating caring relationships contributes to a democratic environment; however, within schools this could be difficult. Noddings (1997) explains that showing children that we care for them involves listening as well as talking.

Although I emphasized the crucial role of the principal in creating democratic schools, Beane and Apple (1999) refer to four schools where democracy was brought to life through the efforts of individuals other than the principal. These individuals included teachers, community members and social activists. In none of the examples did the motivation for democratic school reform originate from the principal, implying that these were bottom-up movements. Democratic schools promote

democratic governance, and Adams and Waghid (2003) purport that it cannot be taken for granted that democratic governance will naturally arise and sustain itself in democratic decision-making structures like the SGBs. I argue that it is the principal who has a crucial role in promoting democratic governance. He or she is the agent of change playing a pivotal role in transforming the school or moving it to become more democratic.

Bäckman and Trafford (2007, p. 6) purport that without the active support of the principal, “democracy is unlikely to take root and grow”. Again the role of the principal as an influential source of leadership is emphasized. Finally, as we progress into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, one of society’s most urgent responsibilities is to galvanize the democratic mission of our schools. Gallagher (2008) takes this argument further by suggesting that this can be done by not only changing what is taught but by transforming how schools operate. Therefore the internal organization of schools, which is to a large extent influenced by the principal, needs to be considered. Wallin (2003) succinctly describes how the principal must encourage democratic principles and facilitate the types of interactions, processes and practices that are essential for democratic school communities to thrive. However, Wasonga and Christman (2009) add that the patterns of principals’ behaviours are likely to determine the extent of the practice of democratic principles.

To sum up, principals play central roles in setting the direction of schools, which in this study involves moving schools to become more democratic. With this in mind, Mullen and Johnson (2006) aptly state that it is necessary for all teachers and principals to be prepared for democratic practice in schools, and this can be expedited through leadership preparation.

### **3.7 School culture**

According to Apple and Beane (2007), principals in democratic schools need to have an understanding of culture. As mentioned, they need to know that democracy should permeate every aspect of school life - and this usually involves reculturing the school. Myers (2008) elaborates that the notion of school culture is essential for practices of democratic schooling. Moreover, democratic schools advance school culture and leadership that model democratic practices. Davidoff and Lazarus (2002) posit that

the culture of the school involves the values and the norms that are expressed in the everyday practices and ethos of the school. This could involve the way learners are engaged in school life, the way individuals interact with each other, the leadership style as well as attitudes with regard to parent involvement in the school. Kluth (2005) adds that culture includes the habits and expectations of the environment. In effect, culture refers to “the way we do things around here” (Davidoff & Lazarus, 2002, p. 52), and Kluth (2005) elaborates that individuals entering the school can learn a lot about the school from the interactions with regard to the teachers and learners and the banners or signs displayed. Most importantly, culture assists in differentiating between acceptable and unacceptable behaviour in a school (Goodlad et al., 2004). With this in mind, it can therefore be concluded that culture guides behaviour.

Print et al. (2002, p. 201) purport that creating a democratic school culture implies that the relationship between the learners and teachers should be “on a more equitable basis”. There should be mutual respect and a commitment to improving democratic processes. Furthermore, learners should be provided opportunities to participate in decision-making, as it is through these experiences and practices that they “learn the processes and rules of democracy and they learn that taking part in a democratic culture means to influence, and be influenced in everyday life” (Print et al., 2002, p. 202).

Taking the aforementioned idea further is Meier (2003), who adds that a democratic school culture has a lot of human interaction, thus referring to communication and participation with regard to the stakeholders. Knight and Pearl (2000) maintain that a democratic school culture not only embraces participation but inclusiveness, decisions that are founded on knowledge and reason, human rights, equality and the establishment of optimum learning environments. They (Knight & Pearl, 2000) add that a democratic culture embraces diversity. Finally, Frank and Huddleston (2009) point out that it is important to create an environment in which individuals are aware that they can contribute to the school decision-making. Essentially, principals are faced with a challenge to create a school culture that promotes democratic principles within the school.

### **3.8 Trends of democratic schooling in South Africa**

In discussing democratic schooling from a South African perspective, I find it necessary to refer to the apartheid curriculum. Naicker (2006) comments on the apartheid curriculum in South Africa, which is referred to as the traditional curriculum, as being dogmatic, authoritarian, teacher-centred, racist and sexist. In fact, with regard to the apartheid curriculum black learners in Soweto in 1976 protested against the teaching of certain subjects in Afrikaans – “a language which was associated with the apartheid system and which most blacks could not speak ... An aggressive police operation ended in violence and the death of several pupils” (Schuster, 2011, p. 42). The advent of democracy propelled the need for a democratic curriculum in the new South Africa.

Campbell (1999) focuses on three aspects of a democratic curriculum. These aspects include firstly critical literacy, which involves being critical of what is read, seen or heard. A similar line of thought is resonated by Beane and Apple (1999, p. 15), who emphasize that a democratic curriculum encourages learners to become “critical readers” of society. The second aspect involves “knowledge and understanding of the diverse intellectual, cultural and scientific tradition” (Campbell, 1999, p. 163). The histories and cultural perspectives of those individuals who were traditionally marginalized should be given attention. Expanding on this point, Kelly (1995) argues that a democratic curriculum should not only be common to all but also suitable for all. It should not, for example, be suitable only for a particular group or sector of society. Finally, the third aspect is the ability to apply knowledge and skills to make informed decisions.

In response to the series of attempts to democratize the South African education system, outcomes-based education (OBE) and Curriculum 2005 (C2005) were introduced and implemented. C2005 was developed within an OBE framework. Rooth (2005, p. 36) elaborates that, “The founding principles of C2005 were drawn from the new South African Constitution, ...with its emphasis on human rights, equity, redress, inclusivity, social and environmental justice and access”. In addition the principle “of openness is at the core of the South African educational curriculum”, promoting debate, discussion and critical thought (DoE, 2001, p. 17). Even the amended National Curriculum Statement Grades R-12: Curriculum and Assessment

Policy emphasizes aspects like teamwork, human rights, inclusivity, and active and critical learning (DoE, 2011).

The National Curriculum and Assessment Policy (DoE, 2011, p. 3) clearly advocates “an active and critical approach to learning, rather than rote and uncritical learning of given truths,” hence a shift from traditional educational practices. It follows that the curriculum is founded on democratic principles enshrined in the Constitution of the RSA. OBE is an approach to education, and Van der Horst and McDonald (1997) posit that its emphasis is on the active participation of learners, thus making teaching and learning learner-centred (Mncube & Harber, 2010). Consistent with preceding thoughts, Mncube and Harber (2010, p. 619) point out that teaching and learning should be viewed as an “interactive and cooperative process”. Within an OBE framework and the general ethos of the curriculum, teachers “and learners engage in a partnership in the learning experience,” characterized by mutual respect (Naicker, 2000, p. 8).

The new curriculum together with OBE aimed at developing learners into critical thinkers who would analyze, engage in problem solving and contribute to society (Van der Horst & McDonald, 1997). It is for this reason that the curriculum is intended to be not only meaningful and relevant but also focused on addressing social and contemporary issues. Within the South African context Harber and Mncube (2010) explain that a democratic curriculum includes learning experiences that assist learners to deal with current issues, like the economic recession and xenophobia. Consistent with this argument is Wringe (1984), who posits that the content of the curriculum should be of relevance to the lives and experiences of the learners. It should include issues that are not only what adults think are important but should also focus on aspects that concern learners (Beane & Apple, 1999).

Mncube and Harber (2010) also make reference to a democratic curriculum and refer to the right of learners to negotiate the curriculum. They (Mncube & Harber, 2010) add that a democratic curriculum acknowledges the right of learners with alternative viewpoints to have their opinions heard. Noddings (1997) also affirms that learners should be co-creators of the curriculum. Stated simply, learners should be afforded the opportunity to contribute towards the development of the curriculum. At this point

I find it necessary to draw on Van Wyk's (2007) argument that in South Africa even the SGB has very little influence over curriculum issues. However, Beane and Apple (1999) posit that teachers should also be involved in creating the curriculum as it is designed for the learners that the teachers are going to work with. Essentially all relevant stakeholders should be involved in the construction of the curriculum.

Steyn et al. (2004) refer to progressive teaching methods that include more democratic teaching methods and as such Print et al. (2002) allude to the transformation of the teacher's role. They argue that instead of merely transmitting knowledge to the learners, as was evident in the past, teachers focus on organizing the teaching-learning environment to encourage dialogue. Topics are discussed, and the learners articulate their views and are taught to respect the views of others. Bryan and Hayes (2010, p. 66) posit that in a democratic school all individuals should be "treated as reciprocal constructors of knowledge". In other words, both the learner and teacher contribute to knowledge construction.

A democratic teaching style encourages critical thinking. Democratic classrooms advance "active, self-discovery and co-operative learning, hands-on experience and debate" (Steyn et al., 2004, p. 89). In addition, a democratic classroom is one where learners have their say on issues related to teaching and learning (Mncube & Harber, 2010). Further, Inman and Burke (2002, p. 68) maintain that democratic schools provide opportunities for learners "to be engaged in dialogue about what they learn". Barr (2007) adds that in a classroom that promotes democratic practices, each learner's voice is equally important and his or her views are equally respected. Grille (2003) explains that democratic processes in the classroom include voting and the forming of committees. Knight and Pearl (2000) concur with the preceding argument by stating that in a democratic classroom learners are equally valued. I would add that there's an open flow of ideas and a genuine concern for the dignity and the rights of the learner. In essence, democratic classrooms emphasize a variety of interactive and participatory teaching and learning methods (Mncube et al., 2011). Moswela (2007), however, alerts us to the concern that teachers themselves need to experience democracy if they are to practice democracy with regard to their learners. This suggests that if teachers are to incorporate democratic principles in their teaching, they have to work in an environment that involves them in the planning and decision-

making processes.

Steyn et al. (2004) maintain that democratic teaching styles assist not only in creating a democratic culture but also promote a democratic way of thinking in learners. Song (2006) extends this idea by stating that in implementing a practice of democracy, the growth of a democratic community is facilitated. Mncube and Harber (2010) point out that within a democratic classroom aspects like the use of diverse teaching methods and strategies, engaging the active involvement of all learners, providing speaking turns for all learners, allowing freedom of expression and debate, all contribute to enhancing the quality of education.

At this juncture I find it necessary to point out that although there is an emerging body of literature with regard to democratic schools in South Africa, democratic school governance, democratic principles and shared leadership feature significantly in democratic schools. These three aspects I believe can be considered as the pillars of democratic schools. With this in mind I draw on literature on democratic school governance.

There is robust research on democratic school governance in South Africa (Mncube, 2009a; Mncube, 2009b; Singh, 2006; Grant Lewis & Naidoo, 2006; Heystek, 2004; Adams, 2005; Adams & Waghid, 2005; Tsotetsi et al., 2008; Masheula, 2003; Van Wyk, 2004). Mncube (2009a, p. 99), who has contributed immensely to democratic school governance in South Africa, purports that parent participation in SGBs is critical in creating a democratic schooling system. However, findings in his study of SGBs in secondary schools in KwaZulu-Natal suggest that, “although parents are part of school governance, most of them are not fully on board”. Mncube (2009a) contends that issues with regard to achieving maximum participation by parents have not been settled. He adds that parent governors lack the necessary skills required to execute duties that they are assigned. Elaborating on SGBs, Mncube et al. (2011), in a study on SGBs in two provinces in South Africa, found that power relations within this structure result in the exclusion of some parents.

This preceding finding is resonated by Bush and Heystek (2003), who in their study of SGBs in Gauteng concluded that SGBs are not fulfilling their role functions and



are relying on the principal to do so. On the other hand, Botha (2010) in his study on principals and democratic management in schools found that that some parents, particularly black African parents, are reluctant to participate in school governance. Botha (2010) also noted that in most SGBs female parent representatives were quieter than male parent representatives. In response to the preceding finding, Botha (2010, p. 584) explains that, “The gendered nature of South African citizenry could account for the low profile nature of women in taking decisions”. In essence, historically South Africa has been a male-dominated society. Botha (2010) contends that the school principal should be seen as an agent of transformation creating space for deliberation and dialogue so that all stakeholders are actively involved in SGBs.

In addition, Bush and Heystek (2003) as well as Tsotetsi et al. (2008) recommend training or capacity building for the stakeholder representatives on the SGB. Mncube et al. (2011) corroborate the preceding statement and advocate training of the SGB members if their role functions are to be realized. However, parent governors are sometimes reluctant to go for training, as was evident in one of the case study schools. Consistent on the issues of training as well as the role of the principal, Van Wyk (2004) found that training influenced the competence of the stakeholder representatives, and essentially the principal was still in charge of school governance. Moreover, while parents form the majority in terms of representation on the SGB, Van Wyk (2007) reported that the parent representatives are dependent on the teachers and principal for leadership and guidance in decision-making. In addition, Van Wyk (2007, p. 136) asserts that in “South Africa the SGB does not have much say over curriculum matters”, and parents even stated that they had very little knowledge of such issues and were therefore reluctant to contribute to curriculum matters. Thus the notion of shared school governance, which is an essential aspect of democratic schools, can be questioned.

On the other hand, in his study on principals’ perspectives of shared school governance in KwaZulu-Natal, Singh (2006) argues that shared school governance requires leaders who are able to develop decision-making structures and processes which stimulate meaningful participation and collaboration. Singh (2006) found that at the core of shared school governance were virtues that included sharing, openness, trust and respect from others. These virtues outlined by Singh (2006) are democratic

principles discussed earlier in this chapter. Although these principals were to a large extent collaborative, which is a shift away from the traditional top-down approach, they found shared school governance a challenge. Principals indicated that one of the challenges to shared school governance was a lack of time. It must be pointed out that they recognized the need for the inclusion of learners in shared school governance, but it was not easy to include the learners in meaningful ways. Singh's (2006, p. 156) study revealed that, "the ideal of principal as democratic leader is emerging".

November et al. (2010) in their investigation of principals engendering democratic practices at schools argue that principals must ensure that democratic structures such as subject committees, the SGB and RCL are properly constituted in accordance with the SASA. In addition, November et al. (2010, p. 789) transfer the focus to the role of the principal as "staff developer; instructional leader and human resource manager". They (November et al., 2010) maintain that staff development is an essential element in the democratization of school structures. As an instructional leader the emphasis is on both curriculum delivery and development. With regard to the role as human resource manager, principals require the capacity to create a school culture that will advance "the establishment of core democratic values as a prerequisite for the enhancement of democratic school practices" (November et al., 2010, p. 790).

November et al. (2010) postulate that it is imperative for principals to learn democratic practices and to promote democratic cultures at their schools. Smit and Oosthuizen (2011) posit that a democratic culture will only develop through democratic practices. However, November et al. (2010) also acknowledge that it is generally assumed that principals are able to engage and promote democratic practices in their schools. Affirming the findings by November et al. (2010) are Harber and Serf (2006, p. 993), who in a study on the role of teacher education with regard to education for democracy in England and South Africa, found that in both countries "teachers did not seem well equipped to take on education for democracy". In line with this finding, Mncube and Harber (2010, p. 623) in their study on democratic schooling and the delivery of quality education in South Africa refer to "the shortage of teachers trained in democratic ways of operating in the school and classroom".

Consistent with the aforementioned findings and as explained in Chapter One, Van Vollenhoven et al. (2006) contend that democracy is being restrained in South African schools. Moreover, Smit and Oosthuizen (2011) refer to misconceptions of democracy and the misapplications of democratic principles in South African schools, thus accentuating the aforementioned responses. In essence, these findings suggest that more can be done with regard to promoting democracy in South African schools.

Mabovula (2008) maintains that a crisis exists with regard to democratic participation and democratic engagement within the SGBs in South Africa. Mabovula (2008; 2009, p. 219) investigated learner participation in school governance in five secondary schools in the Eastern Cape Province and found that although the democratization of school governance has given all stakeholders a powerful voice in school issues through the RCLs, “learners’ voices are, seemingly, being silenced”. In addition, Mabovula (2008, p. 298) classified the learner participation in these five schools as “tokenism, manipulation and decoration”. By tokenism she meant that learners were on the SGB as mere tokens. Manipulation implies that the learners were manipulated and compelled to go along with decisions that were already agreed on by other stakeholders. With reference to decoration, Mabovula (2008, p. 298) believed that the learners were used as “monuments to decorate the structure of governance,” so as to create the impression that democratic principles are promoted at the schools.

Similarly, Mncube and Harber (2009) explored learner involvement in SGBs in South Africa and compared it with Britain. They concluded that both parents and learners seem to be excluded from policy formulation and made specific reference to the exclusion of parents and learners in the formulation of the school code of conduct. They (Mncube & Harber, 2009, p. 33) maintain that, “... there are indicators that learners in South Africa in most schools are solely used for decoration and as tokenism”. Botha (2010, p. 583) also concurs that governing bodies are given “puppet status” and exist only for window-dressing.

Extending the aforementioned assertion are Adams and Waghid (2005), who in their study in schools in the Western Cape found that despite the existence of the SASA, SGBs do not seem to be conclusively democratic. Findings from the study show that

although parent and learner representatives on the SGBs participate, their “voices are seldom heard. They participate without having the opportunity to influence decisions, meaning they are actually excluded from the process” (Adams & Waghid, 2005, p. 31). Adams and Waghid (2005) contend that, unless policy on governance is implemented together with an effort to develop the innate capacities of SGB members, there is little chance of democratic governance being realized in disadvantaged schools. They (Adams & Waghid, 2005) also posit that, for structures to operate democratically, its participants require an understanding of what democracy is. In addition, participants “need to be educated and empowered regarding the principles of democracy” (Adams & Waghid, 2005, p. 25).

However, as pointed out by Botha (2010, p. 584), one of the primary tasks of the school principal is to create “spaces for debate and dialogue so that parents and learners can participate sufficiently in SGBs”. The studies outlined above clearly resonate the need for shared school governance and the need for participation and collaboration by all stakeholders, which is at the heart of democratic schools.

Mncube and Harber (2010) explored the experiences and practices of teachers in providing democratic schooling as a way of delivering quality education for learners in three provinces in South Africa. Their findings revealed a link between democracy in schools and the provision of quality education. Mncube et al. (2011, p. 56) explain that, “listening to parents, encouraging their participation and giving them more power and responsibility (i.e. greater democratisation) can enhance school effectiveness and facilitate school improvement”. Mncube and Harber (2010, p. 622) add that in democratic schools “Learners have come to be seen as active, with a natural desire to learn, making them capable of effective learning and responsible for their own learning”. Hence this attitude of learners contributes towards quality education. The study also found that the participants had varied understandings of democracy in schools. In addition, there were concerns and paradoxes with regard to the democratization of schools. Although there was general support for greater democracy in schools, some teachers were opposed to it believing that it could result in chaos. Teachers felt that learners should have a say in issues concerning their teaching and learning, such that it contributes to a democratic curriculum. Another

point was that the content of the lessons should be meaningful and relevant, and learners should be able to relate to it.

Drawing from the review of related studies it is apparent that the role of principals in creating, leading and governing democratic secondary schools in KwaZulu-Natal must be given priority. It is for this reason that I am of the opinion that this study would contribute to the growing body of literature on democratic schools both nationally and internationally.

### **3.9 Challenges to and controversies in democratic school development**

Harber and Davies (1998, p. 151) point out that Winston Churchill “once described democracy as the worst system of government apart from all the others”. It follows that democratic schools, like democracy, is far from perfect. Instead both can be touted as ideals, and I thus find it necessary to point out critical challenges and controversies associated with democratic schools. Ekholm (2004), Adams and Waghid (2005) as well as Beane and Apple (1999) contend that democracy involves tensions and conflicts and as such living with tension and resolving conflict is an integral part of the democratic process. It is for this reason that Collinson and Cook (2007) contend that practising democratic principles is often messy. Thus schools need to understand and work with internal conflicts. Furthermore, democracy should be seen as a basic attitude permeating everyday life.

Alluding to the challenges of democratic education is Morrison (2008), who states that the challenges extend to the learners, teachers and institution as a whole. Learners from conventional schools with rigid hierarchical structures in the organization find it difficult to adjust to a more democratic environment, as they are accustomed to their passive roles. With regard to the teachers, Morrison (2008) points out that very few teachers have experienced democratic education themselves. This is true in the South African education scenario. Many teachers and principals were educated and trained in institutions that practiced rigid authoritarianism. In accordance with this reasoning, November et al. (2010, p. 786) remark that the position of the principal “has traditionally been locked into a paradigm of power that made principals authoritative and hence anti-democratic”. This implies that teachers and principals need to extend their knowledge and experiences about democracy, democratic attitudes and

democratic decision-making. In line with the above Harber and Serf (2006) note that for schools to operate democratically, teachers need to learn ways of working democratically in both the whole school and the classroom. In addition, Smit and Oosthuizen (2011, p. 62) contend that in South African schools much of the difficulties experienced in school governance can be “attributed to ignorance and lack of knowledge of democratic principles”. Frank and Huddleston (2009) appositely state that democratic schools require new skills of teachers and training, which is fundamental and is lacking in many countries.

In addition, moving towards democratic schools requires effort and sincere commitment from the teachers and principals. Ryan and Rottmann (2009, p. 474) affirm that translating these democratic ideas into action is not a simple task and can be challenging as our schools are centred on “deeply entrenched hierarchical relationships that work against such practices”. Thus attempts to introduce democratic practices represent a giant leap of faith into the unknown (Morrison, 2008). Teachers may also fear losing control because of the increase in learner voice. Elaborating on this point, Davies (1999a) as well as Bäckman and Trafford (2007) comment that teachers fear that giving learners a voice will impact on discipline. Bäckman and Trafford (2007) assert that there is a general misconception that school democracy is discordant with good discipline. Levin (1998, as cited in Wallin, 2003) and Barr (2007) suggest that school leaders are not only nervous but also totally opposed to granting learners greater participation in school decision-making.

Institutions themselves can pose challenges to democratic education - evident in conventional schools in the use of space and time (Barr, 2007). The school day is divided into periods and the school is generally divorced from the wider community. In addition there is generally a high population density in the building, both factors that work against democracy. Dialogue, decisions and the building of trust that are essential to democracy require time and therefore may be hindered. This argument is substantiated by Collinson and Cook (2007) as well as Ekholm (2004), who state that time needs to be set aside for learners and teachers to discuss democracy in their schools. Klinker (2006) contributes to this argument by commenting that cultivating deep democratic ideals takes time. Extending this argument further, Woods and Gronn (2009) state that democratic procedures contribute towards an organization's

inefficiency as time and effort involved in respecting democratic principles can be viewed as resources deflected from achieving the fundamental aims of the organization. Moreover, “decisions may be delayed substantially and the direction of the organization rendered unclear by prolonged debates” (Woods & Gronn, 2009, p. 437). The existing school curriculum over-emphasizes learner assessment as well as teacher evaluation and places practical restrictions on what can be achieved (Frank & Huddleston, 2009). However, teachers can strive for maximum interaction and collaboration with learners as well as integrating democratic practices in normal day-to-day activities.

Scharf (2001) draws our attention to large learner numbers in school and its influence on learner participation. He argues that schools with very high learner numbers will not contribute to effective learner participation. Graebner (1988, as cited in Beane & Apple, 1999) raises caution to the fact that there could exist an illusion of democracy, in which participation is encouraged so as to influence consent for decisions that have been determined in advance. However, it is important to note that democratic schools are centred on the notion of ‘we’ and involve a responsibility to build a community that includes the school and the society in which the school exists.

Finally, both Anderson (1998) and Foster (1989), as cited in Ryan and Rottmann (2009, p. 476), assert that establishing democratic practices in schools will remain a challenge because many of these attempts are superficial and camouflage “subtle controlling practices”.

### **3.10 Conclusion**

In this chapter I focused on key themes of democratic schooling, including an international and national perspective. My discussion also included the need for democracy in schools, democratic schools and democratic principles, democratic school development, the role of the principal in a democratic school, school culture and challenges and controversies of democratic school development.

I now move on to the research design and methodology of this study.

## CHAPTER FOUR: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

### 4.1 Introductory remarks

This chapter focuses on the research methodology and research design of this study. Methodology can be defined as the way of thinking about and studying social phenomena (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Elaborating on this definition, Henning, van Rensburg and Smit (2004) emphasize that research methodology is about the various ways of bringing meaning to our world so as to improve our understanding of it. From the above it can be concluded that research methodology is concerned about the specific ways of understanding our world. With that said, it must be pointed out that this study is situated within an interpretive paradigm; further discussion continues in this chapter.

Having stated that this chapter highlights the research design of this study, it is imperative to briefly outline what is meant by this term. LeCompte and Preissle (1993) maintain that research design focuses on the research purpose and research questions, the information that addresses the specific research questions and the most appropriate strategies for obtaining the information. Following the same line of thought is Wiersma (1991), who refers to research design as a plan or strategy for conducting research; as such it includes various aspects ranging from the selection of participants to the analysis of the data obtained. However, Hammersley and Atkinson (1995, as cited in Flick, 2008, p. 37) argue that research design should be “a reflexive process” which occurs in every stage of the project. It is evident that research design is crucial to any study and involves various components that include the research aims, sampling, research instruments, ethical issues, data collection and data analysis. I argue that research design forms the structure or plan of a study and in doing so gives direction to the study. It guides the research process, thereby trying to ensure that the research questions are addressed. In essence, the research design focuses on what I wanted to do, which was to explore the experiences and practices of principals in creating, leading and governing democratic schools, and it also outlines how I carried this out. Furthermore, it assisted me with crucial issues pertaining to issues of quality in research, including validity and reliability.



Given the preceding definitions of research methodology and research design, this chapter lists the research aims and research questions and provides insight into research paradigms and qualitative research that frame this study. I go on to describe a case study, the research instruments, research population and sample, research sites, data analysis and limitations of the study. Thereafter I focus on issues related to quality in research, including validity and reliability. As I move towards closing the chapter, I concentrate on ethical considerations and the pilot case study.

## **4.2 Research aims**

Inherent in the purpose of this study were the following aims. To:

- Explore principals' notions of democratic schools.
- Examine whether principals are attempting to create, lead and govern schools democratically.
- Explore the principals' experiences and practices in creating, leading and governing schools democratically.

## **4.3 Research questions**

Based on the aforementioned research aims, the critical research questions included:

- What are the principals' notions of the concept of democratic schools?
- Are principals attempting to create, lead and govern schools democratically?
- How do principals create, lead and govern schools democratically?

## **4.4 Research paradigms**

Terre Blanche and Durrheim (2006, p. 6) assert that, "Paradigms are all-encompassing systems of interrelated practices and thinking that define for researchers the nature of their enquiry along three dimensions". These three dimensions include ontology, epistemology and methodology. Terre Blanche and Durrheim (2006) add that ontology focuses on the nature of reality that is to be studied as well as what can be known about it. Epistemology is concerned with the nature of the relationship between the researcher and that what can be known. Basically it involves how one has come to know what they know. Finally,

methodology outlines how or the process through which the researcher has come to understand the phenomenon being studied (Henning et al., 2004).

Bassey (1999) offers further insight by defining a paradigm as a system of coherent ideas about the nature of the world and of the role of researchers which, adhered to by a group of researchers, influences the patterns of their thinking in a particular way and underpins their research actions. Creswell and Clarke (2007) refer to paradigms as worldviews that we bring to our research and which influence how we design and conduct our projects. Drawing from the above definitions, paradigms can be defined as ideologies or views of the nature of the world, and these guide the research methods. Some of the paradigms include positivism, post-positivism, critical theories and interpretivism (also related to constructivism). In the discussion that follows I will briefly discuss the four worldviews outlined above.

#### **4.4.1 Positivism**

Neuman (1997, p. 62) asserts that logical empiricism, post-positivism and naturalism are “varieties of positivism”. The world, it is argued in a positivist paradigm, is rational and operates according to scientific laws and rules (Henning et al., 2004). Positivists believe that the ultimate truth exists and is waiting to be discovered. They emphasize that there is only one reality and it is the researcher’s responsibility to uncover this objective reality and prove it through empirical means (Wiersma & Jurs, 2009). Following the same line of thought is Neuman (1997, p. 69-70), who argues that the positivists assume that individuals share the “same meaning system and that we all experience the world in the same way”. The positivist researcher would include observation, surveys, measurement and statistical analysis in his or her study. It is for this reason that the methodology of the positivists is often described as quantitative. Thus in searching for objective reality from a positivist perspective, the researcher should remain neutral and detached so that research can be value-free. Furthermore, it is believed that our understanding of the world should be impartial and unbiased.

From the aforementioned description a criticism leveled against the positivist theoretical paradigm is its lack of consideration with regard to how people make meaning. Neuman (1997) elaborates on this argument by asserting that positivism has been criticized for equating individuals to numbers and its concern for statistical data,

which is irrelevant to the actual lives of individuals. In addition, I argue that because of the complexity of human nature it is difficult to understand human experiences and practices, especially in education, in rigid scientific ways as laid out by the positivist. To summarize, positivism fails to consider our unique ability to interpret our experiences (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2001). It is for the reasons outlined above that I believe that the positivist paradigm would have been inappropriate for my study. Having explained the positivist paradigm and its inherent limitation, I now briefly outline the post-positivist paradigm that emanated from the concerns leveled against positivism (Blaxter, Hughes & Tight, 2006).

#### **4.4.2 Post-positivism**

The post-positivist paradigm is also referred to as post-empiricism, and as mentioned it has evolved from positivism and goes a step further to incorporate interpretation. Having outlined the inappropriateness of the positivist paradigm with regard to research on human experiences and practices, the post-positivists on the other hand acknowledge the influence of values and theories in research. They advocate rigorous methods of qualitative data collection and analysis (Creswell, 2007). In addition, they believe in multiple perspectives from participants rather than a single reality. Wiersma and Jurs (2009, p. 10) contend that, “conclusions are stated in terms of probabilities rather than certainty”. Although post-positivism goes beyond the belief of a single reality as well as recognizes the influence of values and theories in research, I am not convinced that this paradigm would have been the appropriate lens through which I could have viewed this study. Having articulated my concern, I find it necessary to provide an overview of the critical paradigm to gauge if perhaps I could have approached my study from this perspective.

#### **4.4.3 Critical theory**

Although critical theory is concerned about society, situations and phenomena, its intention is not only to ensure understanding but rather to bring about change and move towards a society that is based on equality and democracy for all its people (Cohen et al., 2001). It addresses social issues and is concerned about existing power relations. Henning et al. (2004) argue that part of this theory focuses on reconstruction of our worlds. Individuals can create their own worlds and influence their futures through action and critical reflection. Critical theory is also concerned about multiple

realities, which they claim need to be examined critically. It can be concluded that critical theory is concerned about critical consciousness so as to address social inequalities that exist. Thus critical theory is rooted in the assumption that reality is continually being shaped by social, political and cultural factors. The preceding statement is resonated by Neuman (1997, p. 77), who asserts that because critical theory attempts to “explain and change the world by penetrating hidden structures that are in constant change, the test of an explanation is not static”. For this reason it can be concluded that critical theory is concerned not only with theory but with practice as well. Although this study focuses on how principals create, lead and govern democratic schools, it is not my intention to focus predominantly on addressing social inequalities. From the foregoing I considered critical theory inappropriate for my study. Having articulated that point, I draw attention to the final paradigm, which is Interpretivism.

#### **4.4.4 Interpretivism: My position as a researcher in the study**

Coleman and Lumby (1999, p. 10) point out that the interpretive paradigm is also “called relativist or phenomenological” paradigms. Neuman (1997) adds that interpretivism is related to hermeneutics, which is a theory of meaning that emphasizes a detailed reading or examination of text. This suggests that the researcher attempts to discover meanings within the text through a detailed study. As opposed to positivism, the interpretive researcher is concerned with the participant’s interpretations of the situation. The implication is that there can be different understandings of what is real. Instead of the ultimate truth or single reality as espoused by the positivist, the researcher within an interpretive paradigm is confronted with multiple realities and multiple interpretations of human experience. Bassey (1999) substantiates the preceding argument by stating that differences in perception, in interpretation and in language influence people’s views on what is real. In addition, the purpose of research according to the interpretivist is to “advance knowledge by describing and interpreting the phenomena of the world in attempts to get shared meanings with others” (Bassey, 1999, p. 44). In essence, the aim for a researcher working within an interpretive paradigm is to understand the world from the participant’s point of view. The emphasis is on a deep understanding of the phenomenon.

Interpretive researchers argue for the uniqueness of human inquiry, and to understand human action or behaviour through interpretation (Radnor, 2002). Following the same line of thought Cohen et al., (2001) state that within the context of the interpretive paradigm the fundamental aim is to understand the subjective world of human experience. This is because researchers working within the interpretive paradigm believe that the world is socially constructed and therefore the aim is to discover how people construct meaning in natural settings.

Through the lenses of the interpretive paradigm I attempted to explore the principals' experiences and practices in creating, leading and governing democratic schools. Drawing from the preceding argument, ontologically the interpretive paradigm acknowledges that reality consists of individuals' subjective experiences, and the researcher may adopt an "interactional epistemological stance toward that reality" (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 2006, p. 7). With this in mind the researcher focuses on methodologies such as interviews and observations that generally point towards the use of qualitative research. Furthermore, the researcher within the interpretive paradigm moves away from the notion that he or she can be separated from the phenomenon under investigation (Henning et al., 2004).

Thus, as a researcher positioned within the interpretive paradigm, I attempted to understand or provide meaning to the principals' experiences and practices in creating, leading and governing democratic schools.

#### **4.5 Qualitative research design**

Having situated this study within the interpretive paradigm, the emphasis is on qualitative research. The ensuing discussion highlights my argument for the use of qualitative research as the appropriate methodology for this study. However, before proceeding to document my explanations I find it necessary to briefly outline some characteristics of quantitative research, which will later qualify my reasoning for aligning this study with the qualitative research methodology.

Central to quantitative research is the view of a single reality, which through measurement and statistics should be obtained as objectively as possible. This implies that the data are quantified. Elaborating on this point is Silverman (2005), who

emphasizes that quantitative research focuses on generalizability, which is achieved through statistical sampling procedures. I refer to these critical features of quantitative research in my discussion as well as in my defence for the use of the qualitative research methodology.

Most frequently the research questions influence the research methodology in a study. Lichtman (2006) contends that some research questions that are addressed more appropriately from the qualitative research design focus on individuals and how they interact in their social settings, and how they see themselves in their environment. Furthermore, questions related to ‘why’ and ‘how’ generally point towards qualitative research. However, Henning et al. (2004) assert that in qualitative research we attempt to reveal not only what happens but how it happens and, most importantly, why it happens the way it does. Thus at the outset I need to state that my first research question, which addresses the meaning or understanding of democratic schools, and the third research question, which focuses on how the principal creates, leads and governs democratic schools, rest well within qualitative research methodology.

Qualitative research emphasizes the lived experiences of the participants (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993; Bell, 2006; Lichtman, 2006; Marshall & Rossman, 1999). In other words, the researcher tries to understand the world of the research participants and this can therefore be explained as understanding the life experiences of individuals. Thus the fundamental aim is to see the world from the individual’s perspective and understand the phenomenon from the individual’s experiences. Unlike quantitative research that is concerned with testing hypotheses, qualitative research focuses on interpretation and meaning. This statement aptly describes the aim of this study, which was to investigate the principals’ experiences and practices in creating, leading and governing democratic schools.

Through the qualitative research design I was able to enter the participant’s life-world and explore their lived experiences. Lichtman (2006, p. 10) maintains that there “are potentially several ways of interpreting what you see or hear”. Thus, unlike quantitative research which is based on a single reality where the researcher is, to a large extent, impersonal, qualitative research allows for construction of multiple realities by the researcher, who is central to the study. Furthermore, unlike

quantitative data that involve numbers, qualitative data are in the form of words and provide opportunities to generate rich, detailed data, although the method may be time-consuming. With regard to this study, I conducted an in-depth inquiry so as to obtain thick, detailed descriptions of this phenomenon (democratic schools).

As mentioned, in the qualitative research process the researcher has a crucial role: “It is through his or her eyes and ears that data are collected, information is gathered, settings are viewed, and realities are constructed” (Lichtman, 2006, p. 12). Detailed consideration is given to the holistic picture or situation of the study (Lichtman, 2006; Morrison, 2007). Following a similar line of thought are Ary, Jacobs and Sorensen (2010), who add that qualitative research aims at understanding a phenomenon by looking at the overall picture instead of focusing on it as separate variables. Morrison (2007) argues that the researcher can only interpret and bring meaning to the data collected if he or she is able to understand the data in a wider social, educational and historic context. In light of the above statement, this study looked at democratic schools within the historical context of authoritarianism that prevailed in the South African education system during the apartheid era and is still prevalent in many schools (Karlsson & Mbokazi, 2005; Grant, 2006).

Finally, I also opted for the use of qualitative research because of its “fluid, evolving and dynamic nature” as opposed to the rigidity of quantitative research (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 13). Within the qualitative research methodology I employed the case study approach, which allowed for the use of various research instruments. Furthermore, I was also able to move back and forth between data collection and data analysis. This was a move away from a linear approach, from data collection to data analysis (Lichtman, 2006). This process between these phases is referred to as an iterative process with emphasis on recurrence, therefore implying that the process is non-linear.

Having provided an overview of quantitative and qualitative research and articulated my reasons for the use of qualitative research methodology, I proceed with defining a case study and discussing the rationale for selection of the case study approach.

#### **4.6 Research approach: Case study**

According to Yin (2009), the case study as a research approach is used in numerous situations to add to our knowledge and understanding of an individual, group, organization, social, political and related phenomena. Creswell (1998, as cited in Fouché, 2002, p. 275) defines a case study as an explanation or in-depth analysis of a “bounded system” (bound by time and/or place) or a single or multiple cases, over a period of time. Drawing from the above definitions, a case study can be defined as a detailed examination of a phenomenon.

Yin (2009) refers to three reasons for the use of the case study. Firstly, ‘how’ or ‘why’ research questions that seek to explain some present circumstance justify the use of the case study. Thus, the more the research questions necessitate an intensive and in-depth description of the phenomenon, the greater the appropriateness of the case study approach. With this in mind, my third research question that focused on how the principals create, lead and govern democratic schools clearly articulated the need for an intensive and in-depth description of the principals’ experiences and practices. Secondly, the case study is a preferred approach when the researcher has little control over the events related to the phenomena, and finally, the third reason is that it focuses on a contemporary phenomenon within a real-life context. Hence the case study approach was utilized as it allowed for an in-depth understanding of the principals’ experiences and practices in creating, leading and governing democratic schools.

Another advantage of the case study method is its potential to allow for the use of various techniques or methods to obtain information. As an approach to qualitative research, a case study involves a detailed and in-depth study of a case or cases. Hitchcock and Hughes (1993, as cited in Cohen et al., 2001) also point out that a case study is concerned with a rich and vivid description of events relevant to the case. In other words, it provides an opportunity for an in-depth study. Best and Khan (2003) contend that the case study analyzes relations between the factors that describe present status or influence change or growth. Bassey (2007) goes on to state that a case study involves being where the action is, taking evidence from the participants. Following the line of thought by authors in the preceding statements, a case study



allowed me to probe beneath the surface and get a deep understanding of principals' experiences and practices in creating, leading and governing democratic schools.

Creswell (2007) identifies three variations in case studies that are related to the intent of the case analysis. The first is the single instrumental case study, in which the researcher looks at an issue or concern and selects a case accordingly. Stake (2008) concurs that the instrumental case study is examined primarily to provide insight into an issue. The second type is the intrinsic case study that focuses on the case itself, "because the case presents an unusual or unique situation. This resembles the focus of narrative research" (Creswell, 2007, p. 74). An example of the intrinsic case study is an evaluation of a new reading programme. The third variation of the case study is the collective or multiple case studies. Demetriou (2009), Bassey (2007) and McMillan and Schumacher (2006) also refer to multiple-site case studies. This study is based on a multiple-site case study as opposed to a single case study, since it is one case study into democratic schools that was carried out at two different sites (two schools).

I opted to use a multiple-site case study as it has the potential to offer insight and exploration into a variety of practices and experiences of school principals, as opposed to an in-depth study at one site that focuses on one principal's experiences and practices in creating, leading and governing democratic schools. Furthermore, this is not a comparative study and I opted to use two secondary schools as I believed they would illuminate my study because secondary schools, unlike primary schools, emphasize the learners' voice, which is articulated through the RCL as well as their representation on the SGBs. In other words, the RCL is the only legitimate body that represents the learners in the SGB.

Herriott and Firestone (1983, as cited in Yin, 2009) maintain that the data gathered from multiple cases are often considered as being more convincing, and the study is thus viewed as being more robust. Yin (2009) also asserts that the analytical benefits of using two or more cases may be substantial. He adds that criticisms regarding the use of a single case design generally mirror uncertainties about the uniqueness or artificial conditions related to the case. Creswell (2007, p. 76), unlike Yin (2009), has a rather differing opinion about the use of multiple cases as he contends that the study "of more than one case dilutes the overall analysis". This implies that the findings can

ultimately be influenced. However, having considered and deliberated on Yin (2009) and Creswell's (2007) arguments, I deliberately selected two schools as I emphatically believed that they would strengthen my findings, as opposed to the use of a case study conducted at a single site.

A major concern with regard to the use of the case study approach is its lack of representativeness of the wider population. This implies that the findings from this study cannot be used to generalize about all school principals in Durban, KwaZulu-Natal. Yin (2009) differentiates between analytical generalization and statistical generalization. He explains that researchers need to understand these two types of generalization when using case studies. Statistical generalization refers to an inference made about a population on the basis of empirical data collected about a sample. In other words, it is a quantitative measure (Bassey, 1999). Thus researchers should not conceive statistical generalization as the method of generalizing the results in a case study. With regard to this study, the preceding arguments would imply that statistical generalizations would be inappropriate since this study is located within a qualitative study. However, a multiple case study lends itself to analytical generalization, in which a theory that has been previously developed is used to compare the empirical results of the case study, and researchers should aim towards this type of generalization (Yin, 2009). Taking cognizance of the arguments and suggestions put forth by Yin (2009), Bassey (1999) and Creswell (2007), I related the theory in this study to my findings.

Having discussed in detail the case study approach and the rationale for using this, I proceed with discussion of the research population and sample.

#### **4.7 Research population and sample**

Maxwell (2005, as cited in Flick, 2008) states that at times there is doubt surrounding the use of the term 'sampling' when referring to qualitative research. However, qualitative researchers are concerned with selecting the 'right' cases for their studies. These cases are not selected in an ad hoc manner; instead, through deliberation, the researcher selects his or her case(s). This would imply that the cases were identified in some systematic way. Thus it is perhaps appropriate to use the term sampling, as is done in this study. Flick (2008, p. 33) adds that sampling is an

essential stage in designing qualitative research, as it is when the researcher reduces the vast number of possible materials and cases for a study “to a manageable and at the same time justifiable selection of cases and materials”.

Before discussing my sampling process, it is necessary to clearly define the terms research population and sample. Best and Khan (2003) define population as a group of individuals that display one or more characteristics in common and that are of interest to the researcher. Thus, for this study I was interested in principals in democratic secondary schools in one school district, south of Durban. Although it is possible to conduct a study on all principals in democratic schools in Durban or even in KwaZulu-Natal, this was not the aim of my study or my intent. This therefore highlights the need for a target population, which refers to the specific pool of cases that I wanted to study (Neuman, 1997). For this study principals in democratic secondary schools in one school district, south of Durban in KwaZulu-Natal comprised the target population. However, two principals in democratic secondary schools comprised the sample, which is the smaller group derived from the population for inclusion in a study (Neuman, 1997; Salkind, 2003; Best & Khan, 2003).

My research study focused on principals’ experiences and practices in creating, leading and governing democratic schools. Thus I needed to find sample sites that offered insight into democratic practices by principals. Two public secondary schools from one large urban area, south of Durban in KwaZulu-Natal, whose principals were willing to participate, were easily accessible and had some characteristics of democratic schools as outlined in my literature review (refer to Chapter Three), comprised the sample. I opted to use two schools so that I could extend my sample, for with two schools (as mentioned earlier in this chapter) there was potential to offer insight and exploration into a variety of practices and experiences of school principals, as opposed to an in-depth study at one school that focused on one principal’s experiences.

The location of the study was also significant. Although I do not teach in these schools, these secondary schools are located in the district where I am currently teaching. Further, the school that I am currently teaching at is a feeder school to the

secondary schools that were included in my sample. Consequently, the findings of the study would be of significance to me.

The selection of the schools involved purposeful sampling, a feature of qualitative research that allows researchers to identify characteristics prior to the data collection (Hammersly & Atkinson, 1995). Purposeful sampling is also referred to as purposive, judgement or judgemental sampling. McMillan and Schumacher (2006) state that in purposeful sampling, the sample selected is based on the researcher's knowledge about the population and a decision is made about the subjects that should be selected to offer the best information for the focus of the research. Cohen et al. (2001) point out that purposeful sampling is deliberately selective. It must be emphasized that I needed to be selective as my focus was on democratic schools, and I therefore needed to select the schools that had some characteristics of democratic schools. As such the schools were 'handpicked'. Thus, with knowledge of the phenomenon I selected the sample deliberately to meet the purpose of this study, which is the essence of purposeful sampling.

Initially, for the purpose of obtaining the sample schools I focused on the following characteristics of democratic schools, as outlined in the literature review:

- Shared decision-making involving all stakeholders.
- Involvement of the community.
- A functioning SGB.
- Equal value of all people, irrespective of age, race, status, socio-economic background and gender.
- Respect and understanding between individuals.
- Advancing open dialogue and communication among all stakeholders.
- A shared value system, "That is, the teachers, administrators, parents, students and others who are actively involved in the school community are in agreement about what is important in the school" (O'Hair et al., 2000, p. 36). This is linked to shared purpose.
- A learner-centred approach to teaching and learning.
- A RCL.

With the above characteristics in mind, I made arrangements to have informal discussions with the school principals to gauge if their schools were to some extent democratic. Although the three secondary schools in the area displayed the aforementioned characteristics and were considered democratic schools, two principals whom I initially spoke to agreed to voluntary, uncompensated participation in this study. In addition, these two schools were more accessible than the third school.

For issues related to confidentiality as well as sensitivity of the research, the two schools that were used in this study were given fictitious names of Red Star Secondary and Excell Secondary School. Thus the two schools because of their characteristics relative to the phenomenon under study as well as the principal's willingness to participate formed my sample. I must point out that all three schools boast excellent matric pass rates in 2010 and 2011. Red Star Secondary had 97%, Excell Secondary School had 78% and the third school achieved 96.2 % matric pass rate in 2010.

I now proceed with a description of the schools, which are the research sites.

#### **4.8 The research sites and their brief descriptions**

Since 1994 the two case study schools experienced a huge increase in the admission of black learners, thus bringing the issue of cultural diversity to the fore. These large schools are co-educational public schools and are characterized by a growing number of black teachers. At both the schools there were teacher liaison officers, and the RCL was elected through a voting system.

At the sample schools I often walked through the corridors during breaks, and at both the schools I noticed friendly interaction between staff and learners. There was a 'warm feel' to the schools and the friendliness and courtesy of the learners were clearly evident. At both the schools the secretaries were extremely helpful and the non-teaching staff were always busy. The principals were also very accommodating and made sincere attempts to assist me.

#### **4.8.1 Red Star Secondary School**

Red Star Secondary School is located in an area that was once considered an elite area for the higher middle class Indian families. However, after 1994 many black families moved into the area. The last decade witnessed an escalating crime rate and this contributed to the deterioration of the area and exodus of many old residents. In close proximity to the school is a graveyard. The vacant land near the school is sometimes used as a dumping site and this is in direct contrast to the neat and clean environment of the school. Not far from the school is a shop where many teenagers hang out. Single parent homes are also on an increase.

My discussion with the principal revealed his disappointment with the crime in the area, especially since the cables in the school were repeatedly stolen. The high crime rate in the area made it necessary to have security gates and to employ security guards. Strict access control was in place and visitors (including myself) had to sign in and were directed to a special parking space. Teachers were on ground duty during breaks, monitoring learner behaviour and occasionally the local police conducted searches at the school. The principal and his staff felt that violence was not an issue at the school. Like Excell Secondary School, the principal was able to secure funding for various projects in the school like the computer centre.

There is sustained high academic achievement at this school and a general feeling in the community is that Red Star Secondary School is better than Excell Secondary School. The principal modestly admits that the academic success at Red Star Secondary School can be traced to principals who have been in the school prior to his appointment. My conversations with teachers and non-teaching staff revealed that many of the learners from good primary schools in the area generally opt to complete their secondary schooling at Red Star Secondary. In addition, the parents of the learners from the surrounding area are working class parents, thus improving the socio-economic background of these families. The home environment could also contribute to a learner's academic achievement. Another factor that perhaps contributes to the learners' academic success is the free tuition that is available for learners on Saturdays. A leading company in the area uses the school for tuition in Mathematics, English and Physical Science. Learners from the surrounding schools are invited to attend.

Red Star Secondary School allows for the enrolment of Grade 8 - 12 learners and the medium of instruction is English. There are approximately 906 learners and 34 State-paid educators. The black learners are drawn from formal and informal settlements from as far as KwaMashu in the north to Port Shepstone in the south of KwaZulu-Natal. Most of the learners come from middle-class backgrounds, and approximately 30% from impoverished backgrounds. The school has a sports ground that was upgraded through fund-raising and boasts a multi-purpose court for tennis and volleyball. A donation from a leading company enabled the school to upgrade the physical science laboratory and through the efforts of the staff the school buildings are well maintained.

This school has a fully constituted SGB. The school fee is R1300 per learner per annum and the school is able to collect approximately 90% of the school fees. The principal has been in the profession for 30 years and assumed the role of principal of the school in August 1998. He received his schooling and teacher training during the apartheid years. However, he furthered his studies to doctoral degree level. His office walls were bare and trophies were displayed on shelves. Four chairs remained permanently in the room and the door was always left open.

On the first day at Red Star Secondary School, I was fortunate to be able to sit in a management meeting that continued for about 2 hours. It was about the post-provisioning norms (PPN): “The PPN refers to the total number of state paid educator posts allocated to an institution regardless of their post level” (Naicker, 2005, p. 8). This process occurs annually and its implementation when translated into the actual process could result in teachers being in ‘surplus’ if the staff establishment is higher than the declared PPN for that year. Conversely, there could be vacancies if the school’s staff establishment is lower than the declared PPN. I witnessed first-hand how the principal, who trusted his SMT, was asked to provide statistics. They also deliberated on the actual document received from the DoE. The management members were free to make inputs and regularly analyzed the statistics and the document.

#### **4.8.2 Excell Secondary School**

In close proximity to Red Star Secondary is Excell Secondary School. Excell Secondary School is located in an area that is rapidly deteriorating because of the increase in drugs, poverty and unemployment. In short, these factors impact on the quality of life of residents. Single parent homes are also on an upward trend and teachers expressed concern that many grandparents are forced to bring up their grand children single handedly. This area has predominantly Indian but a rapidly increasing number of black families. Close to the school are residential homes, a small shopping centre, a large ground used for sport and a bridge that is used by many learners who reside in the municipal flats that lack maintenance. There have been numerous cases of muggings, and crime on the bridge. Hijackings in the area have escalated. Despite the social issues within the community the principal was able to secure funding for various projects in the school, like the computer centre and a science laboratory.

Excell Secondary School draws its learners from the surrounding areas. This school admits learners from Grade 9 – 12 and has an enrolment of 1113 learners and 37 State-paid educators. English is the medium of instruction. There are three secretaries who contribute to the smooth running of the school. According to one of the secretaries responsible for the statistics, most of the learners come from impoverished backgrounds. With school fees at R1200 a year, Excell Secondary school is well resourced with facilities that include a swimming pool, two computer laboratories and a technology centre that was sponsored by leading companies in the surrounding area. The building and other facilities are well maintained. This school also has a fully constituted SGB that plays an active role in the school. The principal is an Indian male and has been in the profession for 33 years. He received his schooling and teacher training during the apartheid years, and holds a postgraduate degree.

Like Red Star Secondary School, this school had security guards and automated security gates. The security guards patrolled the school with bicycles. Teachers were on ground duty monitoring learner activities in the morning and during breaks. Parents from the SGB visited the school regularly to assist with monitoring of learner behaviour, especially in the mornings and afternoons. At times the local police searched learners. These factors according the principal and staff assisted in curbing



learner violence. However, there was a concern about alcohol abuse and ‘house parties’ that some learners were involved in.

The principal’s office boasted two huge pictures of two prominent leaders, Mahatma Gandhi and Nelson Mandela. The school’s vision and mission statements were displayed on the office wall and there were three additional chairs in his office. The door was always wide open and teachers, learners and parents frequently came into his office. The school’s award certificates for good matric results were displayed. The principal had a notice board in his office with important school-related documents displayed. The staff room was situated in the same block as the principal’s office, and I could often hear teachers laughing and debating issues, which added to the positive atmosphere of the school. I can still vividly recall my first morning at the school when I was greeted by two female learners and escorted to the administration block.

Having described the research sites, I now focus on the research instruments.

#### **4.9 Research instruments**

At the outset it must be pointed out that I opted to use the term research instruments, which also refers to research methods (Crawl, 1996; Blaxter et al., 2006), research tools or techniques of data collection (Bless & Higson-Smith, 1995). Yin (2009), however, refers to the research instruments as sources of evidence. Having clarified the terminology, which I argue is synonymous and can be used interchangeably, it must be pointed out that the use of a case study allows for data to be collected through several methods (Burton & Bartlett, 2005; Heck, 2006; Salkind, 2003). Thus a good case study, which incorporates a variety of methods, allows for an in-depth study. Heck (2006, p. 380) concludes that a specific strength of the case study design is its potential to bring various types of evidence to focus on a phenomenon.

In this study the research instruments employed included observations, semi-structured interviews and document review, as I believed that these instruments collectively illuminated my study and assisted in corroborating the data obtained. These instruments allowed me to explore the democratic processes, structures and principles in the school, which in essence is the lived democratic life at school. Furthermore, I was able to explore how the principals ‘do’ democracy at schools.

Each instrument had its advantages, and these will be explained in detail in the subsequent discussion. Moreover, the use of a variety of data collection methods as mentioned above ensured triangulation. According to Cohen et al. (2001), triangulation refers to the use of two or more methods of data collection and is discussed in detail later in this chapter. However, for now I proceed with my discussion of each of the research instruments.

#### **4.9.1 Observations**

##### **4.9.1.1 Defining observations**

Best and Kahn (2003) state that observation involves documenting details of behaviours, events and the contexts surrounding these. Quite simply, observation involves the process of observing behaviour. Although the detailed descriptions can be converted to numerical data and analyzed quantitatively, for the purpose of this study the data were analyzed qualitatively.

I opted to use observations since this tool provided me with the lens to witness first-hand some of the principals' practices in creating, leading and governing democratic schools. This means that I was able to see and hear for myself during that period all that was related to the principals' practices and experiences in school. Thus observations provided the lens into the principals' lived experiences. With this in mind, I refer to Robson (2002), who purports that through observations the researcher is able to experience what happens in the real world. Alston and Bowles (2003) categorize observation as structured and unstructured. They (Alston & Bowles, 2003) go on to add that in a study the researcher may choose to be a participant observer, which involves becoming part of the research situation. This implies that the researcher may actually participate in the events being studied. Yin (2009) points out that with participant observation there are opportunities for manipulation of minor events. This raises issues concerning bias, which influences the credibility of the study.

On the other hand, the researcher may decide to be a non-participant observer, implying that the researcher does not participate in the events pertaining to the study. Thus for this study I was a non-participant, which meant that I was in the background as unobtrusively as possible, recording information, and I tried not to influence the

flow of events. Through this type of observation I believe I had little influence on the participants' behaviour. Furthermore, I was of the opinion that non-participant observation would provide me with first-hand experience on the realities of the principals' practices and experiences. However, it can be argued that the participant who is aware that he or she is being observed may not behave as he or she normally would. Bless and Higson-Smith (1995) assert that individuals who are aware that they are observed may alter their behaviour and become uneasy. For this reason I had to gain the trust of my participants, and I achieved this by explaining to them in detail the focus of my study; I also pointed out that I was not on a fault-finding mission. Furthermore, I was cautious about being or even appearing to be officious during my interaction with the participants.

#### **4.9.1.2 The observation process**

With permission from the participants and since they were not distracted, I simultaneously made notes during the observation. This assisted in reducing the risk of omitting crucial data, which may have happened if I waited to document details at a later stage. Each principal was observed in the school for a period of two weeks. Furthermore, non-participant observers usually enter the research site with knowledge of what they want to observe and the reason for the observation (Moyles, 2007). During the observation I used an observation schedule (Appendix I). Creswell (2007) refers to an observation protocol to record information. He suggests including sections for descriptive notes and reflective notes. The descriptive notes should capture the observer's attempt to document the flow of activities, while the reflective notes, as the word suggests, allow the observer to reflect and draw conclusions about the activities.

Thus when conducting the observations of the principals, some of the aspects I focused on included interactions with others, reactions of the participants to specific issues, and non-verbal behaviour displayed by participants. Non-verbal behaviour included gestures and facial expressions. Furthermore, I tried to establish the principal's predominant leadership style as well as the atmosphere that prevailed during interaction with others. The participant's office or working area, especially the arrangement of the furniture, also revealed significant information. In addition, I observed staff briefing sessions, formal SGB and staff meetings at each school, as I

felt that these could offer substantial evidence about the participant's interactions with other stakeholders in education. Some of the issues at the SGB meetings (Appendix J) which I focused on included the interaction of parents, learners and teachers, the duration of the meeting, representation of individuals at the meeting, participation by each member, and prevalence of issues of democracy (e.g. rights of individuals, communication, collaboration, transparency, openness and shared decision-making). Similar issues were considered in the observation of staff meetings (Appendix K).

#### **4.9.1.3 Techniques for observing and recording behaviour**

Salkind (2003) outlines different techniques for observing and recording behaviour in the field, which can be incorporated into four general categories. The first category is referred to as duration recording and involves the researcher keeping a track of time, which determines the length of time for which the behaviour occurs. For example, a researcher interested in knowing how much written work occurs in the reception unit will use a stopwatch to record the duration of the event. The second category, referred to as frequency recording, focuses on how often the occurrence prevails. The third category is interval recording or time sampling, and refers to observation during a particular interval of time. The last or the fourth category involves continuous recording, and this implies recording all the participant's behaviour, without focusing on any specific set of behaviour. Salkind (2003, p. 138) maintains that this is a rich and fruitful way of collecting information. However, the process of analysis becomes a rather long, drawn out process because it involves rigorous sorting through of the records.

With reference to Salkind's (2003) categories to observe and record behaviour, I engaged in continuous recording but tried not to lose focus of specific aspects crucial to this topic, some of which included participation, shared decision-making, open dialogue and interaction with other stakeholders. The reason for my decision to engage in continuous recording was because I did not want to overlook any significant aspects of behaviour. Elaborating on this argument is Neuman (1997, p. 362), who maintains, "It is better to err by including everything than to ignore potentially significant details".

Having discussed the techniques for observing and recording behaviour, I now draw attention to the advantages and limitations of observations.

#### **4.9.1.4 Advantages and limitations of observations**

Observations assist in determining whether individuals do what they state they do, or behave in the way they claim to behave (Bell, 2006). Marshall and Rossman (1999) believe that the advantage of observation is that data are collected in the natural setting, which in this study was the school. In collecting data in the natural setting it is possible to capture the natural behaviour of the participants. However, it must be pointed out that on the first day it did seem a bit awkward sitting and observing the principal. The second day proved much better, and by the third day I felt as if I had become part of the furniture.

Still on the issue of capturing the natural behaviour of the participants, observations allow the researcher to obtain data on non-verbal and verbal behaviour. Moyles (2007, p. 239) summarizes the primary advantage of observation as a research tool by stating that it can provide “direct access and insights into complex social interactions and physical settings”. However, its major weakness is that it is difficult to replicate. In addressing issues related to researcher bias, I made detailed notes of observable actions and ensured that the notes were neutrally descriptive. I also tried not to include my own judgments in my field notes, and in this way I was able to achieve a level of neutrality.

It must be pointed out that it is difficult to observe everything that happens. Furthermore, specific aspects of behaviour that were observed required clarification or explanation. It is for this reason that I conducted interviews, which served to supplement and corroborate the data collected. Corbin and Strauss (2008) add that it is always beneficial to combine observation with interviews so as to verify interpretations with the participants.

I now elaborate on the use of interviews, which served as an alternative technique to capture data.

## **4.9.2 Interviews**

### **4.9.2.1 Defining interviews**

Interviews assist in providing insight into peoples' behaviours, and the findings are reported in as near as possible the actual words of the individuals (Ribbins, 2007). Anderson (1993) defines an interview as a form of communication between individuals for a particular reason related to subject matter that has been decided. With reference to the above it can be concluded that interviews have a purpose and questioning forms an integral part of interviews. Best and Khan (2003) add that an interview can be viewed as an oral questionnaire, since the interviewee provides an oral response as opposed to writing a response.

### **4.9.2.2 Types of interviews**

Lichtman (2006) outlines the different types of interviews, which include in-depth interviews, semi-structured interviews, informal or casual interviews, focus group interviews and online interviews. Bell (2006) refers to unstructured interviews that can also produce valuable data, but raises caution to the fact that this type of interview requires much expertise. This study used face-to-face (also referred to as one-on-one or individual) semi-structured interviews to gather descriptive data in the respondent's own words. As pointed out, it is difficult to observe everything that happens. Furthermore, specific aspects of behaviour that were observed required clarification or explanation, and this allowed me to compare the non-verbal behaviour of the respondents with the responses. In addition, the semi-structured interviews had some flexibility and allowed me to explore, among other things, the meaning principals attached to the notion of democratic schools, explanations of the structures and processes in place, as well as the challenges experienced in moving the school to become more democratic. I was also optimistic that the individual one-on-one, face-to-face semi-structured interviews would allow participants the opportunity for deep reflection.

It is for the reasons outlined above that at each school I interviewed the principal, three parents, three learners and three teachers. Within this sample I included one parent representative, one teacher representative and one learner representative from the SGB. Parents, teachers and learners who were not on the SGB were included for richer perspectives on school democracy and to assess perspectives of those who were

less engaged with the school. The teachers, learners and parents were selected through convenience sampling, which is also known as accidental or opportunity sampling (Fogelman & Comber, 2007). Those who were accessible and responded to the request for volunteers to participate in the research comprised the sample. It can be concluded that the principle of voluntarism was the pre-condition with regard to participation in the one-on-one, semi-structured interviews. The interviews with the various stakeholders offered further insight into the principals' practices and even corroborated the data obtained from the observations as well as the interviews with the principals.

Structured interviews were inappropriate for this study as they tend to be more rigid and therefore could have limited the data gathered. Semi-structured interviews, on the other hand, are more flexible as they allow the interviewer to probe and expand the interviewee's responses (Hitchcock & Hughes, 1993). Furthermore, as mentioned I interviewed teachers and parents as well as learners, and semi-structured interviews were most apt as opposed to the rigidity of structured interviews.

#### **4.9.2.3 Advantages and limitations of interviews**

Although interviews are time-consuming they provide opportunities for in-depth probing. They also allow for immediate follow-up on responses. This is reaffirmed by Bell (2006), who points out that one of the key benefits of the interview is its adaptability. Cohen et al. (2001) maintain that one of the disadvantages of interviews is that they can lead to subjectivity and bias with regard to the interviewer. For example, the interviewer's presence, tone of voice and structuring of the questions may influence the interviewee's responses. With this in mind, I tried to be as impartial as possible and deliberately tried not to lead the interviewees on with the tone of my voice or use of words.

Neuman (1997) provides more detail in his six categories with regard to interview bias. The first category includes errors by the respondent, which includes forgetting information, misinterpretation or even lying because others are present. The second category focuses on unintentional errors that occur because of the interviewer's carelessness and ranges from contacting the wrong interviewee, reading the questions in the incorrect sequence, recording the incorrect response and misinterpreting the

interviewee. “Intentional subversion by the interviewer” is the third category that is identified (Neuman, 1997, p. 259), and this involves deliberately altering the responses, omitting questions, rephrasing questions or even selecting a different interviewee. I argue that linked closely to this category is the degree of trust and the researcher’s integrity, which are essential. The fourth category is centred on the interviewer’s expectations about the interviewee’s responses because of issues related to the interviewee. An example will include the socio-economic background of the interviewee. Failure of an interviewer to probe answers or to probe correctly is the fifth category, and finally the sixth category looks at the interviewer’s influence on the responses, which refers to the interviewer’s attitude, tone of voice and reactions to the responses.

Although it is difficult to completely eliminate the researcher’s influence on a study, Neuman’s (1997) categories of bias informed me of a range of aspects related to the interview that I was cautious about. In addressing issues of bias as delineated in the preceding paragraph, I prepared a common interview schedule (Appendix H) to avoid ambiguity and to ensure some form of consistency, sequence and phrasing of the main questions. Some authors (Lichtman, 2006; Anderson, 1993; Creswell, 2007) refer to the interview schedule as the interview protocol. Corbin and Strauss (2008) refer to the periods of silence that researchers experience during interviews, and I believe that the interview schedule assisted in eliminating this problem as the questions that were thought of in advance appeared on the schedule. Furthermore, I wanted deeply thought out responses, and to avoid long periods of silence I opted to give the interviewees the interview schedule well in advance. The schedules were distributed a few days in advance and allowed the interviewees time to think through their responses. I made a deliberate attempt to read each question to the interviewee, and enquired whether clarity was required. I must emphasize that the questions were to a large extent open-ended, which allowed the interviewee to think and reflect on his or her experiences. In this way I was able solicit additional information from the interviewees, which contributed to obtaining rich data.

#### **4.9.2.4 The interviewees**

Apart from the principal at Excell Secondary School I interviewed a 50 year old, male Indian teacher representative; a 17 year old, Black female learner representative and a



44 year old, Indian male parent representative from the SGB. Other interviewees at the school who were not representatives on the SGB were a 35 year old, Indian female parent; a 36 year old, black female parent; a 24 year old, black female teacher; a 42 year old, black male teacher; a 16 year old, black female learner and an 18 year old, Indian female learner. Table 4.1 provides insight into some of the background characteristics of the interviewees.

**Table 4.1 Summary of background characteristics of the interviewees at Excell Secondary School**

INTERVIEWEE	AGE	GENDER	RACE	SGB REPRESENTATIVE	TERTIARY QUALIFICATION	EMPLOYED
Parent 1	44	Male	Indian	✓	✓	✓
Parent 2	35	Female	Indian	✗	✗	✓
Parent 3	36	Female	Black	✗	✗	✓
						Number of years of teaching experience
Teacher 1	50	Male	Indian	✓	✓	29
Teacher 2	24	Female	Black	✗	✓	3
Teacher 3	42	Male	Black	✗	✓	10
Principal	56	Male	Indian	On the SGB	✓	35
Learner 1	17	Female	Black	✓	(✓ is yes; ✗ is no)	
Learner 2	16	Female	Black	✗		
Learner 3	18	Female	Indian	✗		

At Red Star Secondary School I interviewed a 43 year old, female Indian parent representative; a 40 year old, Indian female teacher representative and a 17 year old Indian female learner representative from the SGB. Other interviewees at the school were a 45 year old, Indian female parent; a 41 year old, black female parent; a 50 year old, black female teacher; a 37 year old, Indian male teacher; a 14 year old black male learner and a 15 year old Indian male learner. The preceding descriptions are summarized in table 4.2.

**Table 4.2 Summary of background characteristics of the interviewees at Red Star Secondary School.**

INTERVIEWEE	AGE	GENDER	RACE	SGB REPRESENTATIVE	TERTIARY QUALIFICATION	EMPLOYED
Parent 1	43	Female	Indian	✓	✓	✓
Parent 2	45	Female	Indian	✗	✓	✓
Parent 3	41	Female	Black	✗	✓	✗
						Number of years of teaching experience
Teacher 1	40	Female	Indian	✓	✓	18
Teacher 2	50	Female	Black	✗	✓	26
Teacher 3	37	Male	Indian	✗	✓	12
Principal	55	Male	Indian	On the SGB	✓	32
Learner 1	17	Female	Indian	✓	(✓ is yes; ✗ is no)	
Learner 2	14	Male	Black	✗		
Learner 3	15	Male	Indian	✗		

#### 4.9.2.5 Use of the audio-recorder

The interviews, which were approximately 40 minutes in duration, were audio-recorded with the permission of the interviewees. I preferred the use of the audio-recorder, as I believed this was an appropriate way of capturing the actual words of the interviewees, thus enabling the richness of the data to be captured. The use of the audio-recorder also allowed me to concentrate on the interview and the interviewees' responses. Furthermore, continuously writing notes during the interview can distract the interviewee, while the process of taking copious notes can slow the pace of the interview. The audio-recordings can be replayed to check the wording of the statements made by the interviewees. In addition, the audio-recordings ensured that all the responses were captured and any significant information, such as the tone of voice, was not omitted.

Elaborating on the use of the audio-recorder, McMillan and Schumacher (2006) claim that, audio-recording the interview provides material for reliability checks. Silverman

(2005) corroborates the preceding statement by suggesting that audio-recordings allow for the tapes to be replayed and the transcriptions improved. Without an audio-recorder I would have had to depend on my notes and memory to recall aspects of the interview, either of which could have been faulty or incomplete.

#### **4.9.2.6 Planning the interview and the interview process**

Prior to the interview the date, time and venue were negotiated with the interviewee. The interviewees were made aware of the duration of the interview. Reflecting on the interview process, I must mention that the interviews did not go as I anticipated. Individuals (other than the principals) were reluctant to participate in the interview, and this therefore proved to be a rather stressful task. Although they initially reassured me that they would participate voluntarily, I had to phone as well as email them continuously to make appointments, which were most often rescheduled by the interviewees. The notion of deadlines or due dates did not seem to register with many of the participants. Perhaps this was because this was a busy time in everyone's calendar. Moreover, even though I returned the transcripts to the participants for verification, there were also instances where I had to go back to them to "dig deeper" and further clarify issues.

Referring to actual interviews, Henning et al. (2004) focus on the flow of the interviews and point out that in terms of their conversational development, interviews display a similar flow. In the present study they generally began with an introduction (Anderson, 1993), in which the research topic and aim or purpose were again articulated. This assisted in setting the tone of the interview as well as establishing a good rapport with the interviewees. During the interview I ensured that the interviewee had time to respond. With the aim of collecting rich data, I allowed the participants some leeway to talk about issues that were not specified on the interview schedule. However, I ensured that the questions that appeared on the interview schedule were adequately addressed.

Henning et al. (2004) contend that during the process it may be necessary to summarize responses. Neuman (1997), however, asserts that the interviewer should avoid summarizing or even paraphrasing as this could result in the answers becoming distorted. However, I preferred the interviewee summarizing the responses. This

assisted me in getting a clearer picture of his or her responses, as well as with checking whether my initial understanding corresponded with that of the interviewee (Henning et al., 2004). I also asked for clarification or expansion of concepts referred to. Drawing from the preceding discussion, although the interview was audio-recorded I did jot down points to record any non-verbal cues. These notes were important as they were used as part of an initial analysis, and were beneficial to helping me achieve more clarity. During the interview I checked the recording machine regularly so as to prevent any mishaps. I started the interviews on time so that I could go through all the questions in the interview schedule. In concluding the interview, the interviewee was asked if he or she had anything else to add. The interviewee was thanked for his or her time and arrangements were made for the transcripts to be reviewed.

Having outlined the development of interviews as shared by Henning et al. (2004), I considered these suggestions so as to facilitate the flow of my interviews. My role included securing the interviewees' cooperation, establishing and maintaining a good rapport with them as well as remaining unbiased during the process of the interview.

#### **4.9.2.7 Interview transcriptions**

After the interviews were conducted I engaged in transcribing the data. Although this was time-consuming, it was to familiarize myself with the data. Henning et al. (2004, p. 105) appositely remark that in the process of transcribing the data the researcher comes close to the data, and the better he or she knows the data, the more competent he or she "will be in labeling units of meaning".

As I immersed myself in the process of transcribing the data, it emerged that with certain responses further input from the interviewees were necessary. Some of the interviewees agreed to follow up interviews. For those who did not agree I decided to highlight specific aspects in the transcripts that the interviewee could elaborate on. I met with the interviewees and explained to them that certain aspects required further probing, and some of the interviewees readily agreed to record their responses on the transcripts since it was convenient for them. Thus the draft transcripts were given to the interviewees to read so as to ensure that I had not misunderstood responses or even omitted pertinent issues related to them. They were allowed to make deletions,

modifications or additions so as to clarify their responses. After reviewing the edited transcripts for accuracy, they were then ready for analysis.

Having discussed observations and interviews, Table 4.3 provides an overview of the research instruments, indicating the research site and the number of observations and interviews conducted at each school.

**Table 4.3 Summary of research sites and research instruments**

School	Red Star Secondary	Excell Secondary
<i>Observations</i>		
- Observation of the principal for 2 weeks	✓	✓
- Observation of SGB meetings, staff briefings and staff meetings	✓	✓
<i>Interviews</i>		
- Interviews with principal	✓	✓
- Interviews with 3 teachers	✓	✓
- Interviews with 3 parents	✓	✓
- Interviews with 3 learners	✓	✓
<i>Document review</i>	✓	✓

I have mentioned that I engaged in document review, and now proceed with discussion on document review.

#### **4.9.3 Document review**

Bell (2006, p. 125) asserts that the word document is a “general term for an impression left on a physical object by a human being”. Best and Khan (2003), who follow a similar line of thought, maintain that documents are records written and kept by individuals who participated in or observed an event. Stated succinctly, documents are written recordings of events. Fundamentally this study included a review of written official sources that were used to complement and corroborate the observations and interviews, thus improving the trustworthiness of the findings. If the evidence were

contradictory, I would have had to “pursue the problem by inquiring further into the topic” (Yin, 2009, p. 103).

The documents revealed aspects that were not found through the observations and interviews. Fitzgerald (2007) asserts that documents can reveal important information with regard to the context and culture of institutions. They offer another lens for the researcher to read between the lines of the official conversations, and allow for triangulation through interviews, observations and questionnaires, which was achieved in this study. Unlike observations and interviews, which require deliberations regarding the negotiation of the date and time for these to occur, the use of documents “can be accessed at a time convenient to the researcher” (Fitzgerald, 2007, p. 282).

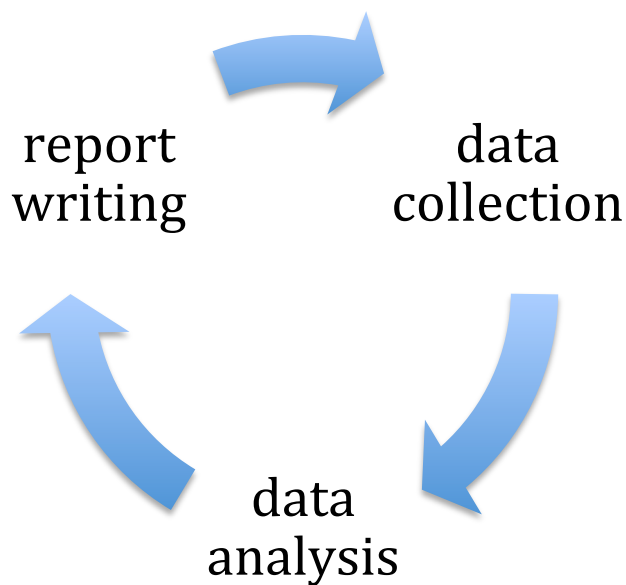
Although documents allow the researcher to obtain data from the words of the participants, Yin (2009) cautions researchers about their use by stating that documents should not be accepted as literal recordings of events that have occurred, as there is always a possibility of the documents being deliberately edited. However, I was aware that documents could be subjective, and as mentioned, the use of interviews and observations enhanced the trustworthiness of the findings. Some of the documents that were reviewed included the agendas of meetings, minutes of staff meetings, SGB minutes, discipline records, incident book, letters and notices to parents. Access to these documents was negotiated with the principals in advance. At each school the documents were reviewed, and since I could not borrow these official documents I was allowed to make photocopies of some policies. Although I spoke about confidentiality, one of the principals emphasized that the documents should be used solely for my research.

Having defined the term documents, described the advantages and limitation of their use and outlined which documents were reviewed; I proceed with discussion on data analysis.

#### **4.10 Data analysis**

At the core of any research study is data analysis, which can be a daunting task, especially when faced with the problem of what to do with all the data collected. This can be regarded as the most crucial aspect in qualitative research, and my ensuing

discussion focuses on this process. However, before offering insight into data analysis I find it necessary to state that data collection, data analysis and report writing are not separate rigid stages in a research project; these processes are interrelated and occur simultaneously (Creswell, 2007; Wiersma & Jurs, 2009). Elaborating on the aforementioned, Henning et al. (2004) assert that the data analysis process in qualitative research is ongoing, emerging, iterative or non-linear. This implies that the researcher can go back and forth from data collection to data analysis. Taking the aforementioned assertions further, I argue that the research process is a cyclical one involving data collection, data analysis and report writing (Figure 4.1).



*Figure 4.1:* The research process.

Analysis can be defined as an attempt to organize, account for and provide explanations of data so that meaning can be made of them (Hitchcock & Hughes, 1993). Neuman (1997, p. 426) elaborates that basically data analysis refers to “a search for patterns in data-recurrent behaviors, objects, or a body of knowledge”. From the above, data analysis can be succinctly described as bringing meaning to and making sense of the data obtained. Marshall and Rossman (1999) state that the researcher should use the research questions and related literature to provide guidelines for data analysis. This is because earlier planning could suggest categories that can serve to code the data initially for subsequent analysis. Voluminous data collected can be overwhelming; therefore, analysis of the data was done

systematically so that there was some order in the process. De Vos (2002) refers to this interaction between data collection and data analysis as a salient feature of qualitative research, and reminds researchers that this is a messy and time-consuming process. Although Lichtman (2006) maintains that there are no agreed upon ways for analyzing qualitative data, I considered the stages delineated by Creswell (2007), Lichtman (2006) and Marshall and Rossman (1999).

Creswell (2007) refers to a general, three-step approach to qualitative data analysis. The initial step involves preparing and organizing the data for analysis, thereafter themes emerge through a process of coding, and finally the data are represented in figures, tables or a discussion. In this study the data are presented and discussed in Chapters Five and Six. Following a similar pattern in data analysis is Lichtman (2006), who refers to the three C's of data analysis, which involves moving from coding the data, to categorizing them and finally identifying key concepts that reflect the meaning that has been attached to the data collected. Marshall and Rossman (1999), on the other hand, believe that the analytical procedures fall into six phases, and these capture the essence of Creswell's (2007) and Lichtman's (2006) steps in data analysis. For the purposes of this study I borrowed from Marshall and Rossman's (1999) six phases in the analytical procedures since I believed that they offered more detail. I outline the phases and thereafter, using the phases as a guideline, explain how I proceeded with data analysis in my study. The phases are as follows:

- Phase 1: Organizing the data so that they are retrievable and manageable to work with.
- Phase 2: Generating categories, themes and patterns. Marshall and Rossman (1999, p. 154) state that, "this phase of data analysis is the most difficult, complex, ambiguous, creative and fun".
- Phase 3: Coding the data. This involves some type of coding scheme for the categories and themes generated. Codes may take a variety of forms that include abbreviations of key words, numbers or coloured dots.
- Phase 4: Testing the emergent understandings; "Part of this phase is to evaluate the data for their usefulness and centrality" (Marshall & Rossman, 1999, p. 157).



- Phase 5: Searching for alternative explanations. Henning et al. (2004) add that the analysis should reflect the participants' perceptions.
- Phase 6: Writing the report.

Drawing from Marshall and Rossman's (1999) six phases in data analysis, the audio-taped interviews were transcribed. With the intention to ensure correction and validation, the transcripts were returned to the interviewees. As part of my data management strategy I arranged my interview transcripts, observational notes and document review notes in separate files on my laptop according to each participant. This ensured that my data were "easily retrievable and manipulable" (De Vos, 2002, p. 354). All my work was backed up both on USB memory sticks and on a Time Capsule in event of my laptop crashing. With the aim of gaining deep familiarity with the data, I listened to interview recordings and studied the interview and observational notes. As I reviewed the data as well as the documents obtained from the schools, I became familiar with them.

Reflecting on this experience, I must point out that I found data analysis to be a long, drawn out process, and it was for this very reason that I frequently turned to my observation notes to reimmerse myself in the milieu of the sample schools. After repeatedly reading the data, the latter were organized into themes and patterns. During the process of developing themes the data were coded according to colours and reviewed repeatedly. De Vos (2002) explains that coding denotes the processes by which data are broken down. I attempted to bring "meaning and insight to the words and acts of the participants in the study" (Marshall & Rossman, 1999, p. 152). In essence, with regard to the key ideas and recurrent themes I endeavoured to provide explanations for them. In doing so I attempted to bring meaning, or what I prefer to refer to as making sense of my data. Finally, Lichtman (2006) re-emphasizes that making meaning from qualitative data involves a process of moving between questions, data and meaning. At this juncture I must point out that my data are presented and discussed in Chapters Five and Six according to the common interview schedule used. Moreover, the critical research study questions informed the common interview questions that appeared in the interview schedule. Having documented the process of data analysis I now delineate the limitations of this study.

#### **4.11 Design limitations**

All studies have their strengths and limitations. Limitations refer to the potential weakness(es) of the study. As mentioned, the findings of this study cannot be generalized as representative of all secondary schools in Durban or even the country. However, it must be emphasized that the aim of this study was not to indicate general trends but rather to describe, understand and interpret the phenomenon. In response to this limitation, I argue that certain aspects of the findings may be of relevance and can be transferred to similar situations, settings or contexts because of shared characteristics. Furthermore, in describing practices and experiences of school principals in creating, leading and governing democratic schools, these descriptions offer insight into ways of moving schools to become more democratic.

Another limitation regards my fears that the participants may have intended to create the impression that their schools were more democratic than they really were, thus impacting negatively on the study. For this reason I used various data collection instruments as discussed, so as to corroborate the findings as well as to identify inconsistencies in the data. I was also apprehensive about the prolonged period of time that was required for collecting data as this could have resulted in the participants becoming annoyed about the whole process. It is for this reason that I used varied data collection strategies, so as to avoid the monotony that may have surfaced through the use of a single data collection instrument.

Finally, I find it crucial to explore the notion of researcher influence within this study and point out that this is not necessarily a limitation of the study but needs to be made explicit. I am of the opinion that my professional identity, that of a teacher in a school within the same area of the research sites contributed to the gatekeepers' approval regarding my access to the school sites. At the research sites I was sometimes referred to as 'teacher', 'researcher', and 'doctoral student'. In other words I was positioned differently, but at all times I confirmed that my role at the research site was that of researcher. As a married, Indian female, who had schooled and trained for teaching during the apartheid years I personally experienced an overwhelming support for democracy. Eight of my interviewees were Black and this racial difference was not an issue to me. I preferred to look at our similarity that revolved primarily around the fact that our lives were presently influenced by a common political

ideology, namely democracy. I must add that I was aware that responses from the interviewees could lean towards past injustices in the education system and this could give rise to some kind of tension during the interviews, perhaps even hindering participation and rapport with the interviewees. However, I felt that the interviewees were sincerely interested about democracy within the school and I was able to establish a good rapport with the interviewees.

During my interview sessions I had to remind myself that I had to change my role from teacher to researcher especially during the interviews with the learners. Although I was not their teacher, I was aware that issues of what I term ‘power relations’ could surface. Hence I tried to remain objective and found myself always curbing my feelings and actions during the interviews. I constantly reminded the interviewees that their voices were significant. Furthermore, I was compelled to interact with all the interviewees before and after the actual interviews. Throughout the process I was aware that I had to be objective and it was for this reason I was cautious about my relations with the interviewees. Although I was polite, I felt that I had to be a critical listener as well and hence tried not to become overly friendly. Even during my observations I preferred remaining an ‘outsider’. As such I tried not to let my personal and professional opinions influence my data.

In addressing issues related to quality in this study as well as protecting the integrity of this study, I move on to research validity and reliability.

#### **4.12 Validity and reliability in research**

Patton (1990) asserts that the validity and reliability of qualitative data are determined largely by the methodological skill, sensitivity and integrity of the researcher. The subsequent paragraphs focus on issues related to validity and reliability in my study.

##### **4.12.1 Validity**

Sapsford and Jupp (1996, as cited in Bell, 2006) take validity to mean the design of research to provide findings that are credible and whether the conclusions of the research corroborate the interpretation. McMillan and Schumacher (2006, p. 324) explain that, “Validity refers to the degree of congruence between the explanations of the phenomena and the realities of the world”. Drawing from the above, it can be

concluded that validity refers to how accurate the data are. Bush (2007a) refers to internal and external validity. He (Bush, 2007a, pp. 98-99) points out that internal validity is concerned with the extent to which research findings accurately represent the phenomenon under investigation, and external validity refers to the “extent that findings may be generalized to the wider population, which the sample represents, or to other similar settings”. As previously mentioned, with a sample of two schools the findings of this study cannot be generalized as representative of all schools in the country. However, certain aspects of the findings may be of relevance and can be transferable to similar settings that display similar characteristics.

McMillan and Schumacher (2006, p. 324) contend that, “claims of validity rest on data collection and analysis techniques”. They recommend various strategies to enhance the validity of the design, and I utilized a combination of relevant strategies to enhance the validity of this study. These strategies include:

1. Prolonged and persistent fieldwork. This was achieved through a lengthy data collection period. Interim data analysis and corroboration ensured a match between findings and participant reality.
2. Multi-method strategies. As mentioned earlier, this study employed three data collecting strategies: interviews, observations and document review. With these three research instruments, triangulation was achieved.
3. Participant language and verbatim accounts. With regard to this study, the interviews were phrased in the participant’s language, which is English. The interviewee was allowed to express his or her views freely and in his or her own words. Transcripts of the interviews included direct quotations since these enhanced validity.
4. Mechanically recorded data. Where permission was granted by the interviewees, an audio-recorder was used during the interview to provide accurate and relatively complete records.

5. Participant review. The interviewees were asked to review the transcripts to determine if their responses were recorded accurately.

6. Negative and/or discrepant data. This involved searching for, recording, analyzing and reporting negative cases or discrepant data. “A negative case is a situation, a social scene, a participant’s view that contradicts the emerging patterns of meanings” (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006, p. 324).

7. Member checking. This was done informally with participants for accuracy of data, as well as the findings and interpretations of the data. This was essential for establishing credibility.

8. Use of multiple researchers. Although multiple researchers can assist in enhancing validity, in this study I was the only researcher collecting the data.

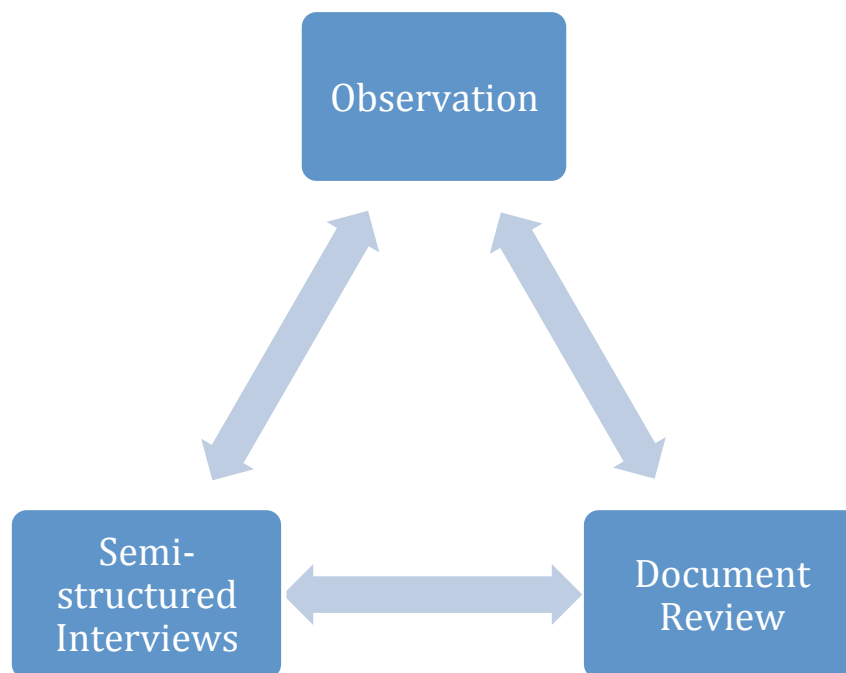
9. Participant researcher. The participant researcher is an informant who can be used to corroborate the data and the entire process. Thus I consulted and had regular in-depth discussions with a “critical friend” about my study.

With regard to the above strategies, I used a combination of them with the intention of enhancing validity of the data.

McMillan and Schumacher (2006) refer to the use of multi-method strategies to enhance the validity of a study. The use of more than one method of data collection within a study is also referred to as triangulation, as briefly outlined previously in my explanation for the use of three methods for data collection. Briggs and Coleman (2007, p. 100) state that, “Triangulation means comparing many sources of evidence in order to determine the accuracy of information or phenomena”. With this in mind, Laws (2003, as cited in Bell, 2006) asserts that triangulation involves seeing the same things from various perspectives and thus being able to verify or dispute the findings of one method with another. Having provided an explanation for the use of

triangulation, Burgess (1982, as cited in Hitchcock & Hughes, 1993) points out that various terms have been used to explain this process, which include mixed method, multi-method, or multiple strategies. Bell (2006) reaffirms the preceding statement by stating that the multi-method approach is known as triangulation.

Figure 4.2 illustrates triangulation involving the data collection instruments used in this study to enhance validity. This implies that the three data collection instruments were used to corroborate the findings of the study.



*Figure 4.2:* Triangulation involving the data collection instruments used in this study.

Thus I have explained in detail validity, and will endeavour to elucidate on reliability within my research study.

#### **4.12.2 Reliability**

Bogdan and Biklen (1992, as cited in Cohen et al., 2001, p. 119) explain that, “In qualitative research reliability can be regarded as a fit between what researchers record as data and what actually occurs in the natural setting that is being researched, i.e. the degree of accuracy and comprehensiveness of coverage”. Anderson (1993) explains that the more reliable the method of data collection, the more likely it is to

yield similar findings if repeated. Conversely, an unreliable method of data collection will produce varied results when repeated. Thus it can be concluded that reliability is about how consistent a data collection instrument might be. Wiersma and Jurs (2009) refer to internal and external reliability. They (Wiersma & Jurs, 2009, p. 9) explain internal reliability as the “extent that data collection, analysis, and interpretations are consistent given the same conditions”. On the other hand, external reliability is concerned with the replication of studies in similar situations, and whether the results that are produced are consistent.

Berg (1995, as cited in Alston & Bowles, 2003, p. 50) outlines methods of ensuring reliability which include “using a systematic and consistent line of questions with different interviewees and carefully setting out how data were collected so that the research can be replicated”. In an attempt to address reliability of the interviews, I used a common schedule during the semi-structured interviews. Best and Khan (2003) add that the reliability or consistency of a response may be assessed by restating a question slightly differently at a later stage in the interview. I am of the opinion that this could prolong the interview and probably annoy the interviewee if this is done for every question posed. Drawing from Berg’s (1995) second suggestion to ensure reliability, I reported in detail how the data were captured. Silverman (2005, p. 222) adds that when activities are audio-recorded and transcribed, reliability may be weakened by failure to transcribe trivial but often important “pauses and overlaps”. Thus when transcribing my interviews I took heed of the aforementioned statement, and even soft utterances by the interviewees were transcribed. Audio-recording the interview assisted with reliability checks. Thus I have outlined how reliability was ensured. Another concern in research is ethical considerations, and in my discussion I reflect on how I addressed this issue.

#### **4.13 Ethical issues**

With an increase in awareness of ethical issues in research it is necessary to clarify aspects related to ethics in research. However, it is important to determine a working definition of the term ethics.

#### **4.13.1 Defining ethics**

According to Cavan (1977, as cited in Cohen et al., 2001, p. 56) ethics can be defined as “a matter of principled sensitivity to the rights of others”. Bell (2006) describes research ethics as being explicit about the nature of agreement the researcher has entered into with the research subjects. I argue that this will also mean that in pursuit of knowledge and truth, respecting the dignity of participants takes precedence. Thus ethics are an essential part of every research project and require detailed explanation. From my initial discussion it is evident that my study involved principals who were observed and interviewed. Teachers, parents and learners were also interviewed. Accordingly, because human participants were involved, ethical considerations were of paramount importance.

#### **4.13.2 Ethical clearance**

Most tertiary institutions have their own ethics policy framework and committees that are responsible for ethical clearance. They ensure that ethical standards are met, and as such any individual affiliated with the institution wishing to pursue research is compelled to apply to the committee to seek ethical clearance. The committee is tasked with reviewing and approving all human subjects research before such research can proceed. The committee clarifies the researcher’s ethical responsibilities and obligations. In addition, the ethical review ensures that the research does not infringe on the rights and dignity of the participants (Clough & Nutbrown, 2007). Thus I had to apply to the ethics committee for clearance and wait for written approval to proceed. In applying for ethical clearance I had to provide my letters to the gatekeepers and the interview protocol, as well as outline how I intended to use my data collection instruments. In addition, I had to elaborate on informed consent and confidentiality.

#### **4.13.3 Obtaining permission from the gatekeepers and participants**

Before obtaining ethical clearance from the tertiary institution, the relevant authorities in the DoE were contacted to obtain official permission and approval to pursue the study in the schools. The aim of the study was outlined; I included how long I intended to be at the research sites and an assurance that my research would not encroach on teaching time. Thereafter I contacted the principals to obtain official permission and support to continue with the study at their schools. I also discussed the



nature and scope of the projected study. Pertinent issues surrounding the observations, interviews and document review were discussed. Those individuals (parents, teachers and learners) at each school that participated in the interviews were also briefed about the research study, its aims and the need for written consent. With regard to the learners, who were under 18 years of age, written permission from the parents or guardians was necessary. I guaranteed all participants anonymity and confidentiality at all times.

#### **4.13.4 Principles of ethically sound research**

Anderson (1993) refers to several crucial issues pertaining to ethical standards that researchers should consider. Some of these issues which I found essential to my study included informed consent, honesty, the right to discontinue participation, confidentiality, right to privacy, and respecting the participant's time. I refer to these issues as basic principles of ethically sound research and expand on each aspect.

##### **4.13.4.1 Informed consent**

Anderson (1993) identifies six basic elements to informed consent, and these include firstly providing an explanation as well as the purposes of the research instruments to be used in the study. Van Dalen (1979), however, contends that it is necessary to provide a precise and understandable explanation of the nature and purpose of the study. Thus I had to clarify to the participants the nature of the study, its purpose, and the use of observations and semi-structured interviews. This leads to the second principle, which is providing a description of possible risks or negative consequences. However, with regard to this my study did not seem to have any potential harm or risks of discomfort to my participants. The third principle that follows involves a description of the potential benefits that can be expected; my study offered insight into practices by principals to move a school to become more democratic. Disclosing any alternative procedures that may be advantageous to the participant is the fourth principle, and the fifth involves offering to answer any questions concerning the research study. Finally, the sixth principle is assuring the participant that his or her participation is voluntary and he or she has the right to withdraw from participation at any time.

Drawing from the above principles of informed consent, an official letter was given to the principals (Appendix B) requesting participation in the research study. Informed consent forms were also explained to the principals, parents, teachers and learners who were participants. The participants were made aware that participation was voluntary and that they were free to withdraw at any point in the study.

#### **4.13.4.2 Honesty**

It is important for researchers to be honest and transparent. Drew, Hardman and Hosp (2008) refer to research deception, which they contend involves an intentional misrepresentation of facts associated with the purpose, nature or consequences of an investigation. They explain that deception involves an omission or commission on the part of the researcher with regard to interactions with the participant. An omission deception implies that the researcher does not provide the participants with complete details about crucial aspects of the study. In essence, part or all of the information about the study is withheld. On the other hand, a commission deception involves revealing false information about the study. To ensure honesty, I outlined the purpose of my study in the informed consent forms and also provided the individuals time to deliberate about their participation (refer to letters of informed consent: Appendices B, C, D, E and F). I also discussed in detail the purpose and nature of my study, highlighting the invaluable contribution of the participants. I endeavoured to be as transparent as possible during my interaction with all the participants, so as to avoid misrepresenting the study.

#### **4.13.4.3 The right to discontinue participation**

It is important for any researcher to respect the participant's decision to withdraw his or her involvement at any time in the study. As mentioned, I informed the participants of this right. I was also aware that should the participants decide to withdraw their participation, I could not in any way coerce them to return to the study.

#### **4.13.4.4 Confidentiality**

Bell (2006) distinguishes between confidentiality and anonymity. Confidentiality is a promise made by the researcher to the participants that they will not be identified or presented in identifiable form. On the other hand, "anonymity is a promise that even the researcher will not be able to tell which responses came from which respondent"

(Bell, 2006, p. 48). Alston and Bowles (2003) add that confidentiality means that the information given to the researcher will not be revealed to others and will be used solely for the purpose of the study. Van Dalen (1979) elaborates on this argument by stating that participants have the right to know that access to the information they have divulged will be limited to the people and purposes that they had given consent to. Within the context of this study, I assured the participants of confidentiality. Although in the subsequent chapters I refer to the participants' experiences and practices I endeavour to protect the identity of the individuals. Furthermore, fictitious names (pseudonyms) were used for the sample schools. Thus when reporting the findings of my study, I did not reveal the names of any of the participants.

#### **4.13.4.5 Right to privacy**

With regard to privacy, the participants have the right to decide which aspects (e.g. habits or opinions) should be conveyed or withheld from others (Anderson, 1993). Technical devices like cameras and audio-recorders are threats to privacy, and it is essential for participants to be aware of the use of such equipment. Since I used an audio-recorder I had to obtain permission from my participants and obtain their consent for the use of this during the interviews.

#### **4.13.4.6 Respecting the participants' time**

Anderson (1993) emphasizes that it is unethical to waste the participants' time on irrelevant issues. My interview schedule assisted in drawing my attention to the significant aspects that were addressed. I also ensured that my interviews and observations commenced and concluded on time.

Having explained some of the principles of ethically sound research and its significance to my study, it is necessary to elaborate on the professional standards of the researcher, that form another component in the ethics of research. Alston and Bowles (2003) make reference to the importance of choosing appropriate research methods, data collection strategies and data analysis techniques. They also focus on plagiarism and state that the findings must be reported honestly, and that one cannot falsify or even publish data that were not collected. Crowl (1996) maintains that plagiarism involves using the writings or ideas of someone else without acknowledging them, thus implying that it is your own work. Researchers have an

ethical and legal responsibility to acknowledge ideas of others through appropriate citations. Finally, all these aspects are of paramount importance and were given due consideration when addressing ethical issues in this research study. Although I have documented my research design and process, I find it necessary before concluding this chapter to include discussion on the pilot study.

#### **4.14 Pilot study**

Anderson (1993) defines a pilot study as a small-scale study carried out before the actual research project. I am of the opinion that a pilot study involves a pre-testing of a specific research instrument. Yin (2009) maintains that a pilot case study assists in refining data collection plans. He adds that the pilot case study reports should clearly outline lessons learnt for both research design and field procedures. In selecting the pilot case, convenience, access and geographical proximity should be considered. With this in mind, I conducted the pilot study in the school that I was teaching in. The pilot case study assisted me in refining my interview and observation schedule. After my semi-structured interviews I included two more questions that I felt were necessary to address research question three. This also assisted in allaying my fears about my approach and interaction when conducting interviews. Finally, it offered first-hand experience in observations.

#### **4.15 Conclusion**

In this chapter I endeavoured to logically set out my research methodology and design, which aimed at facilitating the implementation of my study as well as enhancing the quality of it. This study is located within an interpretive paradigm with emphasis on qualitative research and a case study approach, and as such these aspects were discussed. I also provided details with regard to sampling, the research instruments that were employed, limitations of the study, ethical issues, data collection, data analysis and the pilot study. Finally, I considered issues related to validity and reliability so as increase the confidence in the results of this study. However, I am of the opinion that because we are dealing with individuals, no researcher may pre-empt all the potential problems that may arise.

Having concluded this chapter on research design and methodology I have paved the way for another crucial aspect of research - the data presentation and discussion.

## **CHAPTER FIVE: DATA PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION - NOTIONS OF DEMOCRATIC SCHOOLING, PRINCIPALS' PRACTICES OF DEMOCRACY, DEMOCRATIC STRUCTURES AND DEMOCRATIC PROCESSES**

### **5.1 Introductory remarks**

Chapter Four focused on the research design and methodology of this study. Chapter Five and Six reflect on how I made sense of the data through the lenses of the theoretical framework and literature review illuminated in the preceding Chapters Two and Three. I am guided by the research questions that informed the common interview questions. Before I present and discuss my data, I find it necessary to refer to the critical research questions that shaped this study:

1. What are the principals' notions of the concept of democratic schools?
2. Are principals attempting to create, lead and govern schools democratically?
3. How do principals create, lead and govern schools democratically?

I must point out that in my data presentation and discussion I frequently refer to the data obtained through the observations and document review to corroborate and/or refute the data obtained from the interviews. Responses to question one from the common interview schedule addressed research question one. Responses from the second interview question addressed the second research question, and finally responses from all the interview questions (except interview question 2.1) addressed research question three.

To strengthen my data presentation and discussion I cite the actual verbatim responses of the respondents, with the intention of presenting defensible and reasoned arguments. As this study is situated within qualitative research, I attempted to capture the lived experiences of the participants through their voices and observations. Each interview question dealt with a specific aspect, and as such I have opted to use broad headings. The length of the data presentation and discussion compelled me to organize my work into two chapters. Hence data presentation and discussion in this chapter focuses on the first five interview questions, and Chapter Six focuses on interview questions six to eleven. Having said that, an analysis of responses to

common interview questions one to five follows.

## **5.2 Notions of a democratic school**

In question one the respondents were asked: ‘What is your understanding of the notion of making a school democratic?’ From the responses it was evident that all the respondents in both schools had some notion of a democratic school. Working within an interpretivist paradigm, there were multiple perspectives with regard to the understanding of a democratic school, and I must point out that during the interview the respondents were not inhibited in articulating their thoughts. A common thread running through all the responses was the idea of all stakeholders being involved in decision-making. For example, teacher 2 from Excell Secondary School stated that:

In a democratic school there is shared and collective decision-making by all stakeholders. All stakeholders are consulted ... when it comes to decision-making everyone participates and everybody’s open and included in decision-making ... (Excell Secondary School teacher 2)

Thus the teacher acknowledged the idea of shared decision-making but also emphasized the need to get all stakeholders involved in the process. This also suggests the need for inclusivity. The idea of getting all stakeholders involved in the decision-making process was echoed by the principal of Red Star Secondary School, who explained that:

My understanding of making a school democratic is that learners, parents, staff and other relevant stakeholders be given the opportunity and space to contribute meaningfully to decision-making for the continued progress of the school. (Red Star Secondary School principal)

At Red Star Secondary School parent 1 also echoed the notion of shared decision-making:

I believe that the key component of an expressly democratic school is the opportunity for all the members of the school governing body to air their views and in so doing take part in decision-making as regularly as possible. But what is even more important is the consideration these views are given. One cannot rhapsodize the merits of collective decision-making without reflecting upon whether the views of teachers, or even learners, are considered in as unprejudiced manner as possible. (Red Star Secondary School parent 1)

The above response accentuates the point that although we can enthuse about collective decision-making, there is a need to consider the way in which the views of the stakeholders are received and, most importantly, the stakeholders should be given an opportunity for shared decision-making. The respondent believes that the views of stakeholders should be received in an unbiased manner. The platform for collective decision-making manifests itself in the SASA 84 of 1996 via the formation of the SGB.

The interviewees in both of the case study schools also shared similar views with regard to the need for shared decision-making in a democratic school. This is clearly evident in the response from learner 1 at Red Star Secondary School:

Decision-making should be shared; everyone involved should be allowed to make a contribution and should share their own thoughts. I don't believe that every decision should be made solely by one person. Involvement of people from outside of the school environment can help a school grow and develop. (Red Star Secondary School learner 1)

Learner 1 from Excell Secondary School felt that in a democratic school,

... everyone – the learners, teachers, parents, stakeholders within the community have their say in the running of the school and where they give their ideas and where they can make the school better. (Excell Secondary School learner 1)

Thus in Excell Secondary School the learner also felt that there should be shared decision-making involving all stakeholders. This notion of shared decision-making which all the respondents in both schools felt strongly about is corroborated by Goodlad et al. (2004, p. 93), who aptly state that democracy is based on the idea that, “we each have a voice and that every voice counts”. Basically the idea of shared decision-making is accentuated within the ‘every voice counts’ framework that is clearly articulated in the SASA. Beane and Apple (1999), strong proponents of democratic schools, emphasize that democratic schools support the idea of widespread participation, thus placing emphasis on inclusion of all stakeholders. Expanding on the preceding argument, Kensler (2010) argues that in a democracy it is assumed that each individual is worthy of participation and hence, I would add, every voice counts.

Consequently, at both the schools the responses articulate the need for flatter, participative structures for decision-making, and this implies a shift from the traditional hierarchical decision-making system that was evident in the past. In other words, the respondents did not view the principal as central to decision-making but as part thereof. The responses regarding understandings of democratic schooling differ from the findings of the studies by Karlsson and Mbokazi (2005) and Grant (2006), which found that the SMT displayed signs of a traditional approach to leadership that emphasized hierarchy. In contrast, the respondents in both the case study schools alluded to shared decision-making as a key process in a democratic school that involves a collective and consultative approach. Although it was clear from the responses that in democratic schools there is a move away from individual decision-making, teacher 1 at Red Star Secondary School commented as follows:

You can't on every single issue be democratic but at least wherever you can if the relevant role players can be identified and their opinions and their comments sought as to what they have to say ... I think there are times when maybe the principal would have to make a decision in a kind of autocratic way for the running of the school, for the wheels to turn. You cannot for every single issue be democratic. There are times when the principal will have to take a stand although it should be more the exception rather than the rule. (Red Star Secondary School teacher 1)

From the teacher's response at Red Star Secondary School it can be inferred that there could be occasions when the principal would have to make decisions unilaterally and the teacher appeared to accept this leadership style. Excell Secondary School teacher 3 also had a similar response and explained:

So the leader has to lead and the leader has to be led at times. I'm just saying then that as the leader the principal has at times to make decisions all by himself and most times as a leader you have to listen to other people. (Excell Secondary School teacher 3)

The respondent also appears to accept the idea of the principal occasionally engaging in decision-making without consulting others. In line with the aforementioned argument was the response from the principal at Excell Secondary School, who stated:

(Err) so sometimes if somebody has to come into my school and tell me I'm being undemocratic – I mean there maybe certain cases, instances, I'm not saying no. It wasn't done intentionally but I can tell you there were more instances I was democratic than undemocratic. (Excell Secondary School principal)



The principal stated candidly that there were instances when he was undemocratic and Excell Secondary School teacher 1 concurred. The latter explained:

With regard to collective decision-making although at most times there is collective decision-making there are occasions when decisions are not negotiable. Policy issues and educator conduct according to the SACE document is not negotiable. He always works within the parameters of the SACE document. (Excell Secondary School teacher 1)

From the preceding responses it can be concluded that there will be times when decision-making is vested solely in the principal. This implies that there will be occasions when the principal makes unilateral decisions. This may not be the rule, but rather the exception to the rule. Similarly, Harris and Chapman (2002) found that at critical times principals adopted autocratic leadership practices. Considering the principal's democratic practices in the school, I am of the opinion that the occasional unilateral decision-making that the principal of Excell Secondary School refers to can be associated with thin democracy (Hess & Johnson, 2010) rather than an undemocratic practice. In extending my argument, I refer to Young (2000) who posits that the extent and intensity of commitment to democratic practice can vary. Essentially, my argument is that the occasional unilateral decision-making reveals a weak commitment to democratic practice.

However, the document review at Red Star Secondary School revealed the School Management Plan 2000<sup>3</sup> that read:

It is imperative that we move away from the farce of 'democratic management' to the tremendous potentialities inherent in a structure where there is democratic participatory management. For this to occur it is vitally important that the whole staff be represented in the processes of decision-making ... 'Traditional staff meetings' should essentially become 'Management Council Meetings' in which members of staff represent themselves and contribute directly to decision-making. (Red Star School Management Plan, 2000, p. 2)

The above plan also referred to breaking up of traditional hierarchies in decision-making and a move towards collaborative participation in organizational decision-making. Thus it is evident that the principal at Red Star Secondary School, as early as

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<sup>3</sup> The School Management Plan 2000 is the school management plan of Red Star Secondary School.

12 years ago in the year 2000, aimed at promoting shared decision-making. Furthermore, from my observations at the school I noted that the offices of the SMT and the staff room were moved closer to the principal's office. This close physical proximity of the offices and the staff room was aimed at increasing interaction, collaboration, consultation and communication between the teachers and SMT of which the principal was part. The principal at Red Star Secondary School commented, "In this way management will get closer to the staff".

Expanding on the idea of interaction and communication is Rizvi (1992), who asserts that democratization of schools means the democratization of communication and social relations. This implies that in transforming schools into becoming more democratic, communication and social relations also need to be altered. Although teacher 1 at Excell Secondary School referred to all stakeholders contributing to decision-making, parent 3 at Red Star Secondary School went on to add another dimension:

This collective decision-making should involve the voices of all those concerned. You can't have collective decision making if individuals representing a particular group are not present. So representativeness is essential. (Red Star Secondary School parent 3)

The interviewee alluded to the need for representation of the various stakeholders on the SGB. This idea was also captured in the following response by Red Star Secondary School teacher 2 who explained:

Collective decision-making must involve all those representing the various stakeholders like the learners, parents and teachers in the actual decision-making or else it cannot be referred to as collective decision-making. (Red Star Secondary School teacher 2)

Excell Secondary School parent 2 aptly stated, "democratic schools will see to it that individuals representing the various groups like the teachers, parents and learners are fully represented". In essence some of the respondents focused on the representation of the various stakeholders with regard to a democratic school, and the representation of the various stakeholders is clearly spelt out in the SASA. At this point I must mention that from my observations, interviews and document review I found that all stakeholders were represented on the SGBs at both the schools.

The principal at Excell Secondary School provided an interesting response about a democratic school working largely within the parameters of a democratic Constitution of the country:

Making a school democratic means entrenching, developing, maintaining and propagating the values enshrined in the Constitution of our country ... if we want to make our schools democratic then we have to locate the schools within the framework of the Constitution of the country... (Excell Secondary School principal)

This implies that the Constitution of the country inevitably lays the foundation for democratic institutions. Following the same line of thought was the principal in Red Star Secondary School, who posited that:

In a democratic school the various stakeholders subscribe to the principles of democracy. The Bill of Rights which forms Chapter Two of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa should be the guiding light when creating conditions for a democratic school. (Red Star Secondary School principal)

Again the idea of a democratic school being associated with the Constitution of the RSA and more specifically the Bill of Rights is highlighted. In sharing their notions of a democratic school Red Star Secondary School parent 2, parent 3, teacher 3 and Excell Secondary School parent 3 and learner 2 referred to the Constitution. The frequent referral to the Constitution by the principals could imply adherence to the Constitution, suggesting that these schools are attempting to (what I term) ‘live’ the Constitution. Equally so, the implication is that the principals are attempting to bring the Constitution to life in the schools. In other words, these principals are trying to model democratic principles inherent in the Constitution. In line with this implication, Genç (2008) asserts that schools should lead learners in line with the principles of democracy, and perhaps this is the intention of these principals.

In addition, the document review revealed the admission policy of Red Star Secondary School that stated: “The school will subscribe to the principles of democracy as articulated in the South African Constitution”. This means that the school aligns itself with the Constitution wherein core democratic principles are articulated, and it follows that democratic schools model democratic principles. Furthermore, adherence to the Constitution suggests living out the core democratic principles. Similarly, Kelly (1995), Kensler (2010) and Mncube and Harber (2010)

resonate this argument that democratic schools are founded on as well as reflect democratic principles. It is also important to note that adherence to democracy involves being committed to its principles (Genç, 2008; Kelly, 1995). Thus in creating democratic schools it is necessary to implement and reinforce the principles of democracy. At Red Star Secondary School, parent 3 echoed a similar notion when she stated, “A democratic school values democracy ... and will therefore promote democratic principles like respect, participation, transparency, critical thinking ...”. Again the idea of the Constitution is reinforced as the democratic principles are enshrined in the Constitution of the RSA. The principal of Excell Secondary School aptly summarizes the aforementioned point:

... making a school democratic cannot be achieved without an understanding of the Constitution and it is the values that are inherent in the Constitution of this country which amongst others deals with the whole issue of collective decision-making, working with teams, the whole issue of consultation, leading the involvement of stakeholders and keeping an open mind... (Excell Secondary School principal)

The principal’s response has a direct bearing on the Constitution of the RSA, which in its preamble emphasizes a new set of values and a move away from the past, so as:

To heal the divisions of the past and establish a society based on democratic values, social justice and fundamental human rights; lay the foundations for a democratic and open society ... and build a united and a democratic South Africa ... (RSA, 1996a, p. 1)

It is evident that one of the aims of the Constitution is to “build a united and a democratic South Africa” (RSA, 1996a, p. 1), and this can only be achieved through the core democratic principles. Some of these principles like respect, collective decision-making, consultation, openness and accountability were referred to by Excell Secondary School teacher 2. At the same school the principal stated explicitly that creating democratic schools requires some knowledge of the Constitution. Basically, without some knowledge of the Constitution of the country democratic schools may not take root and develop. Interestingly, Nkomo et al. (2004) share a similar view and assert that it is essential for all social institutions working within the parameters of the Constitution to advance a society that reflects the values and principles of the democratic Constitution.

From the aforementioned responses, it is evident that the respondents have moved

away from a narrow conceptualization of a democratic school that focuses predominantly on electoral processes and instead included aspects like collective decision-making, teamwork and consultation. Referring to conceptualizations of democracy, Hess and Johnson (2010) mention procedural democracy, which they maintain rests on the notion that democracy is mainly a process involving the structural components of governments and politics. On the other hand, Yilmaz (2009) contends that the various conceptualizations of democracy can be reflected on a continuum: at the one end there is formal, procedural democracy and at the other end there is a social conception of democracy. Perhaps of significance is my argument that to understand democracy we need to move beyond the abstract and practice democracy, which will imply living it.

At this juncture I must confess that at the outset of this study I repeatedly psyched myself up to try to believe that I was entering this study with no preconceived ideas about the responses I hoped to obtain. However, before the start of my data collection I had a preconception (which I could not shake off) that my respondents would equate a democratic school primarily with electoral processes, which to me was a rather superficial understanding. However, I was astounded by all my respondents' interpretations of a democratic school. Their profound thoughts suggested that democracy and democratic schools are of significance to them. This could also imply that they are attempting to live democracy.

In expressing her understanding of a democratic school, Red Star Secondary School teacher 1 referred to all stakeholders "sharing purpose and common vision". Teacher 2 at Excell Secondary School reiterated this idea by asserting that a democratic school shares a common vision, and parent 2 from the same school was of the opinion that a shared vision "can be simply stated as a shared idea as to what we want the school to achieve". Parent 1 from Red Star Secondary School explained that a shared vision provides an ideal to work towards. Excell Secondary School teacher 1 elaborated on the aforementioned point:

... there should be common aims and purposes. This means that there should be a shared vision where everyone comes on board to work towards agreed upon goals. Shared vision and shared decision-making encourages all stakeholders to take ownership of the decisions. (Excell Secondary School teacher 1)

The responses clearly indicate the need for shared purpose and shared vision in a democratic school. I am of the opinion that these emphasize a shared understanding with regard to the goals of the organization. Furthermore, shared vision and purpose has the potential to strengthen partnerships among the various stakeholders, thereby creating a sense of community. Affirming the notion of the need for a shared purpose and vision in a democratic school was the principal of Red Star Secondary School, who posited that, "... a democratic school is one where stakeholders feel sufficiently empowered to contribute meaningfully to the realization of the school's vision and mission". However, he also acknowledged that, "we need to understand that a vision can't be just a piece of paper hanging on the wall therefore we don't even have that". In other words, the principal alluded to the fact that the vision and mission of the school should be realistic and attainable rather than something that is there merely for the sake of it. He reiterated that the school's vision should be a shared one and therefore emphasized:

It ... is not (err) an individual's vision but a collective vision ... people need to understand that this is a vision for the school and we are not working here for individual glory. We are not working here for our egos. (Red Star Secondary School principal)

The principal's response implies that the shared vision of the school should be the product of the various stakeholders' visions, rather than a vision of one individual. What's more, in achieving the vision it is not about the self-image or glory of an individual. Excell Secondary School parent 2 pointed out that a shared vision is "what we want and not what one individual wants" for the school. Extending this idea are Davidoff and Lazarus (2002), who allude to the significance of a shared vision as they explain that this creates a sense of collective responsibility. They also caution that it is difficult to realize a vision that is centred on one person's ideal. This would imply that without a shared vision it is easy to lose sight of the purpose of the school. Thus the principal at Red Star Secondary School emphasized the need for all stakeholders to contribute to the realization of the school's vision. It follows that dialogue and inclusiveness with regard to decision-making are necessary, and this alludes to participative leadership.

At Red Star Secondary School and Excell Secondary School the principals articulated the need for empowering the stakeholders, thus suggesting that empowerment will feature in a democratic school. Red Star Secondary School parent 3 stated:

Democracy is very often associated with social upliftment of its people. So in a democratic school empowerment will be an important characteristic. By this I mean that a democratic school will promote the growth or development of individuals. (Red Star Secondary School parent 3)

The parent suggests that democracy aims at improving the lives of citizens and it follows that democratic schools will advance the development of individuals and hence the need for empowerment. Extending this idea the principal at Excell Secondary School maintained:

So as leaders we must also be mindful of empowering others. But not only empowering but giving respect ... You do not create committees and undermine it. It's a very undemocratic practice ... (Excell Secondary School principal)

Dimmock (1995) concurs that in democratic schools there is a need to empower individuals. Bush and Glover (2003, p. 18) point out that participative leadership “supports the notion of shared or distributed leadership and is linked to democratic values and empowerment”. The principal at Excell Secondary School referred to creating committees in the school, thus alluding to teamwork and delegation as empowerment. In this way a collaborative work environment is being encouraged.

From my observations and document review at both the schools, there were various committees in place. Some of these included different learning area committees, committees for various codes of sport, a finance committee and discipline committee. The principal stated emphatically that the committees should not be undermined. This implies that he delegates power and has faith and trust in these committees such that he will not undermine the decisions made. In addition, within the concept of empowerment the principal's response also suggests a shift from the traditional view of the principal as the sole leader in the school to shared leadership. The idea of creating committees implies delegation of tasks, which in turn suggests that leadership is being extended to others. Furthermore, leadership is not limited to selected individuals. Thus the notion of distributed leadership has relevance.

The principal also commented on the need for respect and believed that it is important to respect the decisions of the various committees in school. In respecting the decisions of others, the notion of trust is created. Respect and the belief that individuals have a right to be treated respectfully were common characteristics acknowledged by respondents in both schools. This is evident in the explanation provided by parent 2 at Excell Secondary School:

Respect as I said is also important. Not only is it important to respect the opinion of others but it is important to also respect the individual. In a democratic school respecting the rights and dignity of others is necessary. There should be respect between teachers, learners and parents. (Excell Secondary School parent 2)

In advancing a democratic way of life, respect is essential. I am of the opinion that respect is the cornerstone of democracy, and there is a need for mutual respect as well as respecting the rights and dignity of each individual. Similarly, the respondent referred not only to mutual respect but also to respecting the rights and dignity of the individuals in a democratic school. Extending this view is Merriam (1938, as cited in Kensler, 2010) who refers to the assumptions of democracy that are fundamental to the actual practice of democracy. One of these assumptions includes the need to promote essential dignity of each individual. The respondent aptly states that democratic schools respect the dignity of individuals.

At Red Star Secondary School parent 1 corroborated the preceding view:

Affording staff and learners the respect and admittance of dignity, fosters stronger relationships and once people are convinced that they deserve respect and that their dignity and rights as a human being are being upheld, care and love for school flourishes. (Red Star Secondary School parent 1)

Although parent 1 at Red Star Secondary School refers to respecting the rights and dignity of individuals, she is also of the opinion that respect contributes towards strengthening relationships. The implication is that respect creates trust, which in turn enhances communication. From the aforementioned responses it is evident that the respondents linked respect with human rights. Basically the respondents felt that in a democratic school respecting the rights and dignity of each individual is essential. Further, Mabovula (2008) highlights the importance of respect and elaborates that respect is a necessary precondition for communication and teamwork (Mabovula,



2008; DoE, 2001). In addition, Snauwaert (2002) posits that democracies advance the idea that all individuals possess an equal inherent dignity or worth.

From my observations, both these principals not only showed their teachers and learners respect, they also displayed an ethic of love and care for both their learners and teachers. This was evident in their interaction and communication with the learners. Vedøy and Møller (2007, p. 58), from their study on principals in democratic schools in Norway, posit that, “A caring approach through focus on possibilities and respect ... is crucial”. Furthermore, Dworkin et al. (2003) emphasize the need for mutual respect between teachers and parents as well as mutual respect between teachers and learners. I am also of the opinion that individuals should be afforded respect at all times and an individual’s dignity should not at any time be compromised. In addition, Dobozy (2007) in her study of learners’ experiences of democracy found that learners in the sample schools were treated with respect and their right to dignity was also recognized. Essentially, respecting the rights and dignity of individuals is fundamental in a democratic school.

Parent 2 at Red Star Secondary School included the point that all individuals should be treated equally irrespective of the socio-economic background, race or gender. Another respondent (teacher 1 at Excell Secondary School) mentioned that democratic schools embrace diversity. The Constitution of the RSA recognizes diversity of culture, religion and language and, most importantly, promotes respect for diversity. Learner 1 at Red Star Secondary School commented:

In making a school democratic a principal should be open to talk and interact with anyone of any race group, gender, or religious preference.  
(Red Star Secondary School learner 1)

The learner’s response accentuates the notion of the principal in a democratic school promoting fair and non-discriminatory practices. Similar thoughts are put forth by MacBeath (2004), who explains that in a democratic school the emphasis is on the equal value of all people, irrespective of gender and background. Within the South African context the Constitution forbids discrimination. Consistent with the aforementioned statements is Barr’s (2007) finding that one of the characteristics of democratic schools was respect for differences of others. Moss (2007) elaborates that democratic practice involves respect for diversity. Interestingly, the various

stakeholders at both the sample schools claimed that their principal embraced diversity.

The respondents at both schools also referred to critical thinking as being necessary in a democratic school. Learner 3 at Red Star Secondary School was of the opinion that democratic schools promote critical thinking. The respondent also mentioned that learners should “question things and not just accept things the way they are.... be open to the ideas and views that others have”. The learner is suggesting that critical thinking involves considering alternative views. Furthermore Red Star Secondary School learner 2 expounded:

Basically democratic schools encourage critical thinking as this is a good way to solve problems and everyone looks at the best way to solve a problem. They look at it from different angles and in that way you cover possible ways of solving the problem. (Red Star Secondary School learner 2)

From the above it is evident that learner 2 associated critical thinking with problem solving. Paul (1992) and Higgs and Higgs (2001) refer to this inextricable link between critical thinking and problem solving. I am of the opinion that critical thinking encourages rationality and allows an individual to think for himself or herself. Thus it was not surprising that the respondents linked critical thinking to a democratic school. Frank and Huddleston (2009) expand on the preceding response, as they contend that critical thinking is a precondition for participating in democratic processes. Elaborating on the aforementioned, Moss (2007) explains that democratic practice involves encouraging critical thinking as well as various perspectives and diverse paradigms with regard to understanding the world. In other words, thinking critically exposes individuals to the views and varied perspectives held by others. Similarly, Mncube and Harber (2010, p. 622) add that in democratic schools, “Learners have come to be seen as active ... capable of effective learning and responsible for their own learning”. They (Mncube & Harber, 2010) maintain that the aforementioned attitude by learners contributes towards quality education.

At Excell Secondary School, teacher 1 acknowledged that a democratic school promotes critical thinking but also emphasized the need for the development of logical argument. In addition the teacher stated that, “To critical thinking I would add

openness and again individuals should appreciate and respect the views of others”. The respondent suggests that critical thinking encourages open-mindedness, and this includes the need to understand and acknowledge the views of others. Furthermore, teacher 1 at Red Star Secondary School maintained:

... trust, transparency and openness feature in a democratic school. All role players must trust each other and hence have faith in each other. Transparency is vital so that all partners are aware of what is going on as well as no-one will feel prejudiced. Transparency and openness lends itself to all individuals being treated equally ... All stakeholders must be able to share opinions, which can be debated, and outcomes accepted. (Red Star Secondary School teacher 1)

From the response above it is clear that trust, integrity, faith in others, transparency and openness are necessary in a democratic school. In keeping with this view, Bryk and Schneider (2003) contend that integrity is an important component of trust and the bedrock of collaboration. Integrity contributes to trust and both are vital to teamwork and collaboration. Shared decision-making as well as collaboration contribute to democracy in a school. Apple and Beane (2007) point out that collaboration is the foundation of democracy itself. They elaborate that democratic schools emphasize faith in the potential of individuals to find solutions to problems (Beane & Apple, 1999). Essentially democracy is associated with faith in the potential of human nature (Dewey, 1939). I believe that collaboration and shared decision-making require faith in others.

The respondent also referred to transparency and openness in a democratic school. McQuoid-Mason et al. (1994) maintain that transparency is the creation of openness and access for others to see what is going on. It follows that transparency enhances openness in a democracy. In her discussion of the principle of transparency, Kensler (2010) refers to the need to share information freely. Therefore in a democratic school there should be a free flow of information so that individuals are aware of what is happening, especially if it concerns them. Stated simply, information should not be deliberately withheld from stakeholders.

Teacher 1 at Excell Secondary School included community involvement. He felt that,

There should be an interaction between the community and the school because the school is an important part of the community. What is also important to note is that the school cannot function on its own as a

separate entity. It has to be connected to the community in which it is located. (Excell Secondary School teacher 1)

Ultimately in a democratic school the interrelatedness between the school and the community is accentuated and the school and the community work in tandem.

However, Red Star Secondary School teacher 2 commented:

A democratic school will work closely with the community. But the community also has to value democracy. You cannot have a democratic school and a community that promotes practices that go against democracy. (Red Star Secondary School teacher 2)

The teacher suggested that it is essential for the community in which the school is located to promote democratic practices as well. Schools need to see themselves as “part of a larger community with the emphasis on cooperation and collaboration” (Mncube & Harber, 2010, p. 617). Kluth (2005) elaborates that in democratic schools learners are not only connected to each other, but to the immediate neighbourhood and wider community. Hence the interrelatedness between the school and the community is heightened.

There was a shared language with regard to the notion of democratic schools, and from the rich descriptions of democratic schools I was convinced that at both of these schools the principals were moving towards becoming ‘democratically minded’. Surprisingly, within the notion of democratic schools very little emphasis was placed on the voting process. Perhaps this is because the respondents view democracy as more than just a political system. The principal of Excell Secondary School added a significant dimension when he stated as follows:

In a nutshell it is important to run schools in a democratic manner in this country but we must be clear as to what democracy does really, really mean. It can mean different things to different people. (Excell Secondary School principal)

The principal affirms that schools need to function democratically, but he is also of the opinion that individuals need to fully understand what democracy really means. Various authors such as Pateman (1970), Carr and Hartnett (1997), Held (2006), Grugel (2002), MacBeath (2004) and Yilmaz (2009) refer to the various conceptions of democracy. However one’s interpretation of democracy would ultimately influence

one's interpretation of a democratic school. The principal of Excell Secondary School went on to say:

Democracy is an ideology that contributes to a culture ... A democracy is only as thriving as its people ... You nurture democracy and you protect it because if you don't protect it somebody is going to abuse it.  
(Excell Secondary School principal)

The principal raises caution to the fact that if democracy is not supported and cared for it can be misused. In addition, he referred to democracy as a set of ideas that contributes to culture and as such its success is dependent on its people. Considering the aforementioned response I refer to Myers (2008), who elaborates that the notion of school culture is essential for practices of democratic schooling. Taking this idea further Jenlink and Jenlink (2008) elucidate that when the activities of the school are guided by democratic ideals, the school becomes a democratically practiced place. Consequently within the school there are shared patterns of behaviour.

With regard to democracy in the school, the principal of Red Star Secondary School said: "I will not pretend to say that this school is totally democratic or it fulfills all the [democratic] principles. I see us evolving in that process". In essence the principal is alluding to the fact that moving a school towards becoming more democratic is a continuous, dynamic process rather than a static state that is achieved. Developing this idea are Bäckman and Trafford (2007), who refer to four stages of democratic development in schools. In stage one there is no trace of democratic activity; stage two represents initial attempts towards democratic values and practices; at stage three there is further progression in democratic practices; and in stage four there is an advanced form of living. Viewed in this light it can be concluded that at Red Star Secondary School the principal is striving to move his school to the ideal democratic state where democratic principles permeate every aspect of school life. However, Bäckman and Trafford (2007, p. 6) purport that, "No democracy is perfect, no school is perfect and no school is perfectly democratic". With this in mind, what is possible is significant movement towards an ideal (Knight, 2001). Finally, the principal in advancing his school on the path to become more democratic needs to review the position of the school regularly and focus on areas that may require attention.

In rounding up this question, I must point out that the responses revealed many

similarities between the two schools. At Red Star Secondary School and Excell Secondary School the respondents emphasized shared decision-making and the inclusion of all stakeholders, and the need for shared purpose and shared vision. Both the schools advanced the notion of democratic schools promoting critical thinking, openness, respecting the rights and dignity of all individuals, and the need for empowering all stakeholders. At Excell Secondary School respondents mentioned the need for representation of the various stakeholders, the interconnectedness between the school and the community as well as democratic schools embracing diversity. Respondents at Red Star Secondary School emphasized the equal value of all people, integrity, trust and transparency as characteristics of a democratic school.

### **5.3 Principals and democratic practices**

#### **5.3.1 The practice of democracy in the schools**

In the second question the principal was asked: ‘Do you think you practice democracy in your school?’ and the rest of the respondents were asked: ‘Do you think your principal practices democracy in your school?’ All the respondents felt that their principals practiced democracy. Even the principals themselves indicated that they practiced democracy in school. Interestingly, the principals at both the sample schools felt that a true reflection would emanate from the responses of other stakeholders. They had no knowledge that I inquired from the stakeholders as to whether the principal practices democracy in school. Thus the principal at Excell Secondary School responded that, “I think I practice it [democracy] but for a fairer answer - will be to consult others”. It is evident that the principal felt that I should confer with the various stakeholders. At both the schools the feeling was that the principal practices democracy in school.

Having anticipated the preceding response I had included the aforementioned question in my common interview schedule for all respondents. The response allowed me to probe into how the principal practices democracy in school.

#### **5.3.2 How the principals practice democracy in the schools**

With regard to the sub-question, the principals were asked: ‘If so, how do you the principal practice democracy in school?’ The other respondents were asked: ‘How does the principal practice democracy in school?’ From the responses it was clearly

evident that at both schools the principals' practices of democracy were connected to their enunciated understanding of democratic schools. In other words there were direct links to question one, which outlined the respondents' notions of democratic schools. In substantiating my argument I refer to Freire (2003, p. 77), who posits that, "thought has meaning only when generated by action". It is for the aforementioned reason that I assert that the principals' notions of democratic schools are brought to life in their actions, which are really their practices. Moreover, my observations of SMT and staff briefing meetings revealed that at both the school sites democratic practice was taking root. For example, at both the schools teachers were encouraged to initiate and spearhead projects and also to share ideas and expertise. Parents were encouraged to contribute to shared decision-making. However, during my observation of the SGB meetings I noticed minimal participation by the learners, thus suggesting that learners' voices are seemingly silenced.

Mncube and Harber (2009) and Mabovula (2008) had similar findings with regard to the learner voice in South African schools. They found that learners were used for tokenism and decoration. This suggests that the learners were merely there for window dressing. In actual fact, referring to Hart's (1992, as cited in Whitty & Wisby, 2007) ladder of participation, level two represents decoration and level three denotes tokenism. These levels, according to Hart (1992), indicate that there is no participation. My observations, on the other hand, revealed minimal participation. In addressing stakeholder participation, Botha (2010) maintains that principals should create spaces for debate and dialogue so that there is adequate involvement of learner and parent representatives on the SGB. Interestingly, Adams and Waghid (2005) in a study in schools in the Western Cape found that despite the existence of the SASA, SGBs do not seem to be conclusively democratic. Findings from their study show that although parent and learner representatives on the SGBs participate, their "voices are seldom heard. They participate without having the opportunity to influence decisions" (Adams & Waghid, 2005, p. 31). This implies that these key stakeholders are really excluded from the decision-making processes.

Although these principals encouraged as well as engaged in democratic practices, they articulated the need for accountability. They acknowledged their status as representatives of the DoE as well as their responsibility with regard to being

accountable. They stated that they were accountable (upwards) to the DoE and to the parents (internal) and learners (downwards). The principal at Excell Secondary School emphasized the issue of accountability with regard to the various stakeholders.

He elaborated:

My accountability is to the Department of Education, my accountability is to the learners, my accountability is to the parents, the community, my accountability is to the staff ... (Excell Secondary School principal)

From the preceding response it is evident that the principal was aware that his accountability flowed in different directions. Red Star Secondary School teacher 1 also referred to accountability with regard to the principal. She explained that,

The fact is that the community was always out there but principals were not answerable to the community. They just ran their schools. But now with the governing bodies on board you have the issue of accountability to the parents. You got the parents there and you need to liaise with them and communicate with them and make sure that the governance of the school is shared with them. (Red Star Secondary School teacher 1)

The teacher refers to the SGB, which according to the SASA is a democratic structure that contributes to accountability. Consistent with the preceding argument, Maile (2002) posits that accountability with its links to concepts such as participation, decentralization, empowerment and transparency should be regarded as a fundamental element of school governance. However, the teacher refers only to accountability with regard to the parents, and accountability that functions in one direction will not advance the aims of democracy (Davidoff & Lazarus, 2002). Instead, as mentioned by the principal of Excell Secondary School, there should be accountability to all stakeholders. Also, the SASA emphasizes the principal's accountability to the parents and learners. Of significance, I believe, is that accountability should not be viewed as a once-off process but rather as a continuous process involving all stakeholders.

In practising democracy these principals promoted a culture of collegiality, collaboration, support and trust. Collaboration and trust are core principles of democracy (Dworkin et al., 2003; Gore, 2002). My observations, corroborated by the interview responses, revealed positive interpersonal working relationships, teamwork and mutual respect. The aforementioned contributed to the culture of collegiality, collaboration, support and trust. The principal at Excell Secondary School explained:



... democracy requires a willingness to work together. If you are not willing to work and participate then democracy doesn't work. It is based on the principle that we all participate in decision-making ... when you talk about democracy and you don't have integrity, honesty and trust then you are making a mockery of democracy. (Excell Secondary School principal)

The principal at Excell Secondary School believes that democracy involves a willingness to collaborate and cooperate. This suggests that democracy is about individuals putting various ideas together. Elaborating on the notion of working together are Print et al. (2002), who point out that democracy is about compromise, willingness to listen to the views of others, willingness to be influenced by the arguments put forth by others, and to accept the attitudes and opinions of others. Goodlad et al. (2004) capture the essence of the notion of democracy requiring the willingness of working together by stating that democracy is essentially a shared way of life. This principal goes on to articulate the idea that democracy involves interaction and this idea is extended again by Goodlad et al. (2004, p. 82), who maintain that democracy "begins with who we are as individuals and the relationships we have with those around us". Basically the principal believes that democracies depend on participation of its citizens.

The preceding idea is also resonated by Kovacs (2009) who asserts that democracies cannot survive without people participating in them. The respondent's statements clearly emphasize the need for teamwork, collective decision-making, integrity and trust in a democratic school. Again the idea of democratic principles comes to the fore. The principal at the same school (Excell Secondary School) added that without integrity, honesty and trust, democracy would be a mockery. Excell Secondary School teacher 1 amplified the idea for the need for trust as evident in the foregoing statement, and elaborated on the issue of faith in the potential of others:

Most importantly he has trust and faith in each one of us. He believes that each one of us has the potential to do more and achieve more. For example a level one teacher has the potential to lead or spearhead major projects. For this reason he also delegates duties. If a teacher is spearheading a project he gives the teacher maximum support to achieve his or her endeavours. (Excell Secondary School teacher 1)

Interestingly, from the teacher's response the implication is that emanating from the principal's belief in the potential of others, duties are delegated. Furthermore, the teacher claims that the principal gives his teachers full support to achieve their goals.

Corroborating the aforementioned statements Excell Secondary School parent 2 commented:

... he believes that learners and teachers have the potential to achieve more. He believes in creating opportunities for them to take on leadership roles. I know for a fact that a few learners were provided the opportunity to travel abroad for leadership programmes. (Excell Secondary School parent 2)

Drawing on the preceding responses it was not surprising that the school's policy document, that made reference to the core values that the school aimed to promote, included "a firm sense of justice" and "nurturing loyalty, respect and integrity" (Excell Secondary School Policy Documents<sup>4</sup>, p. 2). Similarly, the principal at Red Star Secondary School stated as follows: "I believe integrity is extremely important. I see it as a sort of cohesive element that ties with the other things [respect and trust]". The principal's response suggests that integrity is vitally important, such that it holds the other democratic principles together.

The parents at Red Star Secondary School also claimed that the principal displayed integrity and respect for others. Collinson (2008) elaborates on the idea of integrity and trust, and is of the opinion that integrity promotes trust and this forms the basis for collaboration. In essence individuals will collaborate with those whom they trust. It is in the same vein that Grant et al. (2010) emphasize the need to develop mutual trust. Mutual trust is essential in teamwork and contributes to achieving a shared vision. Bryk and Schneider (2003, p. 40) add that collective decision-making is facilitated through strong relational trust and is built through "day-to-day social exchanges in a school community". Essentially mutual trust is fundamental to collective decision-making.

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<sup>4</sup> The policy documents at Excell Secondary School revealed amongst others the mission statement, the school philosophy, school ethos, core values and school motto.

Moreover, in addressing the sub-question: ‘How does the principal practice democracy in school?’ the response provided by teacher 1 from Excell Secondary School in the foregoing paragraphs provides insight into the principal’s leadership style. He contends that the principal is not a one-man team; instead he sees leadership as emanating from others in the organization. The response provided by the teacher implies a distributed perspective of leadership (Spillane et al., 2005; Woods et al., 2004). The principal draws on the skills and expertise of others, but at the same time it is important to note that he provides his teachers with the necessary support. In extending leadership to others (specifically the teachers), the principals are contributing to a collaborative ethos. Red Star Secondary School teacher 1 also articulates the notion of a distributed perspective of leadership. She elucidates that,

Leadership would be [distributed]. It’s throughout the different levels – level 1, level 2, and level 3 but also you do not really feel that there’s somebody you are answerable to. You are a leader. He has confidence in you to run your subject, to do your work in the classroom, make decisions amongst yourselves in little committees. So you know you find that you don’t actually feel that you lacking. You are pretty much in control of what you are doing in the school. (Red Star Secondary School teacher 1)

From the teacher’s response it is clear that the principal at Red Star Secondary School does not see himself in a position of power, making all the decisions. Instead he sees leadership as being an extension beyond the actions of the school principal. This is in line with what Spillane et al. (2007) suggest. Although the principals did not refer specifically to a distributed perspective of leadership, it is apparent that both have approached leadership from such a perspective.

Further, Williams et al. (2009) refer to traditional school structures that are arranged into hierarchies, with top-down leadership that tends to isolate teachers. In contrast, from the interview responses and observations it is evident that the principals at Red Star Secondary School and Excell Secondary School place very little emphasis on the hierarchical structures in the school, and the teachers are offered opportunities to work as teams as well as to chair committees. Moreover, the principal has faith in the potential of others. Beane and Apple (1999) offer insight into democratic schools and assert that in such schools there is faith in the potential of individuals to find solutions to problems. Dewey’s (1939, p. 124) statement corroborates the preceding claim that,

“democracy has always been allied with humanism, with faith in the potentialities of human nature”. In line with Dewey’s contention, these principals have faith in the potential of others. In addition, Hess and Johnson (2010) explain that faith in people is fundamental to a social understanding of democracy. This suggests that perhaps these principals are working within a social understanding of democracy.

At Red Star Secondary School the principal referred to serving the community. He stated:

people need to understand that ... we are not working here for individual glory. We are not working here for our egos but we working here to serve ... My leadership style place emphasis on serving learners, educators and parents, rather than assuming the position of an authority figure. (Red Star Secondary School principal)

The principal states categorically that he is not there for personal goals but rather he is there to serve, and this suggests servant leadership. Greenleaf (2002, p. 27) posits that servant leadership “begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve, to serve first”. At both the schools the principals believed in supporting team members, promoting shared decision-making and caring behaviour, as well as empowering and developing the potential of staff so that they could give of their best. These are characteristics of servant leadership. Servant leadership also moves away from the principal positioned at the apex of the hierarchy.

All the teachers at Red Star Secondary School and teacher 1 and 2 at Excell Secondary School mentioned dialogue. From my observations at both the schools the principals were engaged in morning assemblies with the learners and staff briefing sessions with the teachers, during which time vital information was channeled. There was always open dialogue with exchange of ideas and opinions at the staff briefing sessions. I must add that the teachers were also involved in conducting the assemblies. At both the schools the principals encouraged high levels of communication and appeared to have good interpersonal relations. From my observations at the schools both the principals frequently walked in and out of the secretaries’ and deputy principals’ offices as they would share ideas or get input on urgent issues. During my observations I noticed that these principals always had their office doors open, except for times when they dealt with highly sensitive and confidential issues. On numerous

occasions learners came to them to discuss issues and the principals listened to the learners and gave the learners their full attention. With this in mind parent 2 at Red Star Secondary School commented about the principal: “You know that he will take time to listen to you ... he gives you his full attention”.

At Excell Secondary School the principal explained:

... the most important - you listen to your learners. You afford them that voice. An open-door policy is fine, but remember there must be somebody inside that room that is able to listen. It's useless me having an open-door policy and listening to you and not giving any credibility to what you say and just because I have to satisfy and say I practice an open-door policy. When you enter a door – an open-door policy means that when you leave there you come out richer. ... You don't want to keep a door open when nobody is in the room and even if somebody is in the room the person is not listening. So it's that listening ear that's critical in a democratic school. (Excell Secondary School principal)

The principal emphasizes the centrality of listening. It is important to note that through listening individuals are exposed to the views of others and thus the voices of those who were previously marginalized are heard. Through listening the principal is exposed to the concerns of others. To this effect Wasonga (2009, p. 209) adds that, “listening to other voices demonstrates a conscious understanding of the significant value of others”. This will include the learners' voice. Extending this line of thought is Noddings (1997), who explains that showing children that we care for them involves listening as well as talking, and this is precisely what the principal had done at Red Star Secondary School. Further, Davies et al. (2006) found that teacher-learner relationships improved as learners felt that they were listened to. Expanding this argument, Steyn et al. (2004) posit that sound interpersonal relations are essential for a democratic society, and as such democratic schools should nurture healthy personal relations. Red Star Secondary School parent 1 elaborates:

X is a strong person with an impeccable character and despite the severe lack of time [after the three-week long teachers' strike] and pressing worries felt by learners and teachers he decided to consult the learners. And so, in a forum of the Grade 12 learner body and their teachers he discussed the pros and cons of various solutions and facilitated a discussion between the learners and teachers. Learners were given a chance to decide whether they were equipped to write the departmental exam or felt unprepared. They were allowed to air their worries and vote on dates on which examinations would take place. The days following this discussion were filled with ingenious strategies to target key subjects, teaching, and more meetings during which the

entire process of planning was explained to the learners and their minds put at ease. (Red Star Secondary School parent 1)

From the response above it is evident that the principal displayed an ethic of care. In addition, it is apparent that democratic principles of collaboration, consultation and communication are not merely rhetoric for the principal at Red Star Secondary School. As expounded, the principal in a highly tense situation opted to confer with both the teachers and the learners with regard to the issue of the examinations. Learners and teachers were given the opportunity to discuss solutions that culminated in a democratic voting process. Of significance is the learner voice that the principal valued, and therefore resorted to the processes of collaboration, consultation and communication. Consultation involves accommodating the views and opinions of others. The principal cared about the learners, allowed them to voice (talk about) their concerns, and they rightfully did so. Thus it can be inferred that the principal displayed an ethic of care for his learners and, most importantly, the parent provides an account of attempts towards democracy in action. Bryan and Hayes (2010) advise that creating caring relationships contributes to a democratic environment.

Appositely, Steyn et al. (2004) draw attention to the view that democracy will only take root if there is free dialogue and discussion on any issue. I am also of the opinion that in this case learner voice was not within the confines of SGB meetings. In terms of Hart's ladder of participation (as cited in Whitty & Wisby, 2007) participation was adult-initiated as the principal brought it about but, most importantly, the decision-making was shared with the learners. In doing so the principal was also creating a sense of togetherness within the school community and promoting a culture of democratic practice.

At Excell Secondary School parent 1 claimed that the principal promotes an open door-policy. He went on to state: "From my experience as a SGB member, I have no difficulty in reaching him. There is no need to make an appointment before seeing him". The parent states that he does not have to make arrangements to see the principal. Instead an open-door policy is practised and this suggests open communication and discussion. At the same school, parent 2 explained: "... even learners can sit with him and discuss issues one-to-one... he accommodates you if

there is an issue you want to discuss”. The response from parent 2 suggests that learners are not turned away if they want to speak to the principal. It is evident from the responses that both the principals believe in consultation. With the channels of communication being open, reasoned dialogue is facilitated and relevant information is exchanged. It is dialogue that facilitates consultation and collaboration (Taylor & Robinson, 2009). With regard to the preceding incident concerning the Grade 12 learners at Red Star Secondary School, an appropriate space or platform was created for the learners and teachers to express their feelings, and it also contributed towards encouraging positive social interaction. In other words, freedom of expression was promoted.

However, Van Vollenhoven et al. (2006) in their study concluded that democracy is being suppressed in South African schools since the right to freedom of expression, as a core right in a democracy, is not currently nurtured. Elaborating on the idea of freedom of expression is the principal of Red Star Secondary School, who expounded that,

Educators, learners and parents are therefore given the opportunity to voice their views at appropriate meetings. Their suggestions are carefully considered when decisions have to be made on certain issues. (Red Star Secondary School principal)

The principal states that the voices of the stakeholders are considered on some of the school issues. In other words, the voices of the stakeholders are listened to. With regard to stakeholder voice, Springate and Lindridge (2010, p. 125) add that, “a school is only democratic when all those involved have a voice in decision-making both in principle and practice, and are prepared to listen to each other”. The principal’s statements suggests that all stakeholders are provided with the opportunity to air their views, and it follows that he is attempting to foster collaborative practices.

However, teacher 1 from Excell Secondary School commented that,

With regard to collective decision-making although at most times there is collective decision-making, there are occasions when decisions are not negotiable. Policy issues and educator conduct according to the SACE document is not negotiable. He always works within the parameters of the SACE document. (Excell Secondary School teacher 1)

Although collective decision-making features predominantly in the school, essentially

policies from the DoE, often directives, and the educators' code of conduct according to the South African Council for Educators (SACE) have to be implemented. Sayed (2004, p. 258) explains that SACE, that was set up in 1996, is "responsible for teacher registration, discipline and conduct, and professional development". Perhaps because SACE is a statutory professional body for teachers, the principal adopts the stance where policy issues and educator conduct according to the SACE document are not negotiable.

Learner 1 from Red Star Secondary School corroborated the statement about being listened to as she described an incident:

Like we had a request for peer mediators having their own line to make it more efficient for them to go on duty. He listened to what we had to say. He gave us constructive criticism but he also listened first to what we had to say. He didn't jump the gun and say I don't like this idea and we are not going with it. He listened. That was the most important thing and then he gave us his decision. (Red Star Secondary learner 1)

Of significance is the fact that the learner emphasizes the words "he listened". This could imply that the learner valued being listened to. Listening to others also involves respecting the views of others. Taking the preceding idea a step further is Schoeman (2005), who argues that respecting others includes listening to their opinions, behaving in a civil manner, and taking into consideration the rights and interests of fellow citizens.

My observation of both principals at the case study schools revealed that they accorded respect to all individuals and respected the rights and dignity of all individuals. At both schools Muslim male learners sought permission to be excused from school on specific days so that they could memorize the holy book, and both these principals consented. This incident also implies that these principals had a tolerant attitude towards other religions. Moreover, from my observations it was apparent, with both the principals, that their interactions with the teachers and learners were characterized by mutual respect. Similarly, Dworkin et al. (2003) as well as the DoE (2001) emphasize the need for mutual respect between teachers and parents as well as between teachers and learners. Furthermore, I believe that respect facilitates collaboration and communication.



Although at both the schools the respondents referred to the principal listening to the various stakeholders, at Excell Secondary School learner 2 offered an interesting response:

Although he listens to our problems he is always telling us that it is better to come to him with solutions to a problem rather than complaining. In this way he gets us to think seriously about the problem. Also the problem is something that affects an individual or some individuals. So it is only fair that these individuals think of ways to solve the issue. When you have a problem you generally know of ways to make it better. (Excell Secondary School learner 2)

The learner maintains that although the principal listens to them, he prefers to listen to their solutions to the problems. At the same school parent 2 also stated that, “ ... he prefers if you inform him of your idea as to how the issue should be addressed”. Similarly, learner 3 mentioned that the principal prefers if they come to him with solutions to the problems they have. It appears as though the principal is trying to get all stakeholders to think critically. Paul (1992) states that critical thinking is necessary for problem solving and it must be pointed out that democratic schools aim at developing learners into critical thinkers (Beane & Apple, 1999; Inman & Burke, 2002; Bryan & Hayes, 2010; Mncube & Harber, 2010). Hence it is not surprising that the principal appears to nurture critical thinking.

At Red Star Secondary School teacher 3 explained:

If he feels that person has something to say or he feels that person has a thought, he will actually ask them to say it out a loud. I know I'm part of that. Sometimes I may just have a thought that runs through my head and he likes to hear it. He likes to hear our arguments and how we justify our ideas. (Red Star Secondary School teacher 3)

The teacher is actually stating that the principal encourages them to articulate their ideas and arguments. This was corroborated during my observation of a management meeting where the principal often asked, “Tell us what you are thinking”. When he wanted solutions to the issue being discussed he often used the following words: “is there any other factor you want to bring in”. In other words, the principal in his attempts to get his staff to present alternate views was encouraging them to develop into critical, independent thinkers. Essentially democratic schools emphasize the need to empower learners and teachers with problem solving and critical thinking skills and the responses from some of the interviewees alludes to this practice.

In creating a democratic school the principal at Red Star Secondary School spoke about the various heads of departments being given the opportunity to run their respective departments. However, he pointed out that, “there is the implicit understanding that there is efficiency and compliance with the requirements of the Department of Education”. Although management members are provided the opportunity to run their departments, the principal states that this is done within the guidelines set out by the DoE. Again on the issue of accountability both individual and shared accountability is implied. Referring to the staff meetings and staff briefing sessions in creating a democratic school, he believed that,

Issues that concern the operational activities at the school are debated and discussed at staff meetings. Educators are allowed to voice their views and to participate on decisions that affect the day-to-day running of the school. (Red Star Secondary School principal)

It is evident that the principal believes in the teachers contributing to the functioning of the school. In this way he is contributing towards the development of a collaborative culture. The principal at Red Star Secondary School added that,

As the head of the institution I am mindful of the fact that the school principal should not lead by authority but rather by being a catalyst for positive change and a motivator for a strong team. I therefore practice democracy by encouraging teamwork and by allowing for various democratic structures to function in the best interest of the school. (Red Star Secondary School principal)

In the preceding statement the principal reveals that he is aware that he should be moving away from the idea of leading by authority. He sees his role as that of a facilitator and guide bringing about positive change and furthering teamwork. Consequently the principal does not view himself as in a position of ‘control’. Although he emphasizes teamwork in the school, he posits that,

Another important aspect of my practice has been working with managers to inculcate the importance of managing and leading democratically. (Red Star Secondary School principal)

Basically the principal is stating categorically that there is a need for democratic leadership, and in creating a democratic school it can be inferred that at both these schools the principals attempted to influence others to move towards a more democratic school. Furthermore this principal sees the need for influencing his management to lead democratically. Elaborating on democratic leadership is Woods

(2005), who purports that democratic leadership involves being committed to fundamental ideas and values that form the bedrock of democracy. Further, Woods (2005) asserts that democratic leadership emphasizes deliberation and supports dispersal of leadership. Within such an environment individuals can develop to their full potential. Drawing from the foregoing assertions and discussions it is evident that at both the schools the principals appear to be committed to discussion, debate, dialogue, distributing leadership and developing the potential of others. This implies that democratic leadership is promoted. Singh (2006, p. 156) accentuates a similar finding that, “the ideal of principal as democratic leader is emerging”.

In discussing how he practices democracy in school, the principal at Red Star Secondary School explained that, “The Bill of Rights enshrined in the South African Constitution remains the guide for the practice at our school”. Thus the Bill of Rights, which is a human rights charter, is the foundation of our country’s democracy and directly influences the running of the school. The same could be said for Excell Secondary School, where teacher 1 pointed out:

Well I must emphasize that our interactions are based not only on trust but there is respect for the rights and dignity of those involved. The interests of all learners always take precedence. He [the principal] reminds us that we as classroom managers are ultimately responsible for our actions in the classroom. Our principal ensures that we are all treated equitably. His belief is that we all should be treated fairly. There are equal opportunities for all members of staff to get involved in the running of the school. Even with gender equity one of his deputy principals is a female. Issues of gender bias or gender discrimination have not been an issue at our school. I would say that our principal recognizes our diversity and embraces our differences. He strives to create an environment that is free of discrimination. He embraces cultural diversity with regard to our learners and educators. (Excell Secondary School teacher 1)

Thus, according to teacher 1 at Excell Secondary School the principal advances the right to have one’s dignity respected and also believes in the right to equality. Moreover the teacher maintains that the principal strives to create an environment that is free of discrimination. These practices can be viewed as furthering the Bill of Rights. In line with the foregoing statements, O’Hair et al. (2000) argue that democratic schools promote fair and just practices. Parent 2 at the same school added that the principal “does not believe in separation and segregation. If anything he is sympathetic to the past inequalities experienced by the masses and he therefore

embraces diversity...” Learner 3 explained: “He believes that our school is open to all learners in the community irrespective of race, language, gender or religious belief. Learners are provided with equal opportunities”. From the responses above as well as my observations it can be inferred that the principal at Excell Secondary School strives to promote fair and just practices.

Parent 1 at Excell Secondary School extended the idea of the principal embracing diversity and provided the following response:

He [the principal] is making every effort to ensure that the staff for example is made up of people from the different racial groups. Bearing in mind that this school was previously a so-called Indian school, he played a pivotal role in ensuring that learners of colour are enrolled from the neighbouring areas. Many African staff members have been recruited and there are also white educators who are members of staff. (Excell Secondary School parent 1)

The preceding response implies that the principal is attempting to address the issue of racial equality and he embraces racial diversity. Moreover, from the observations and the interview responses it appears that the principal wants the learner population and teaching staff to reflect the diverse South African society. This suggests that he honours diversity with regard to race. Moss (2007) elaborates that democratic practice involves respect for diversity. Corroborating this argument are Knight and Pearl (2000), who add that a democratic culture embraces diversity. I must point out that South African society is diverse in various aspects like culture, abilities, sexualities, and religious beliefs. Thus democratic schools should embrace these diversities.

In her response to how her principal practices democracy, learner 3 at Excell Secondary School spoke about the principal’s “caring attitude towards others especially the learners”. Parent 3, teacher 3, teacher 2 and learner 2 also felt that the principal cared about those in the school community. At Red Star Secondary School all the parents, teachers, learners 1 and 3 referred to the principal’s personality. Teacher 1 expounded:

Well in our case it is our principal’s whole personality. He has a very - what should I say – a very human side to him. You know, he is a very considerate person and always will give you the benefit of the doubt... He has a positive approach to everything. Whatever you do, he would support it if and where he can. Like in terms of your own personal studies or whatever you are doing in the classroom. If you are doing a

project with the children or if you are running an extra committee, you know you will always get his support. (Red Star Secondary School teacher 1)

The teacher acknowledged the positive personality traits of the principal that contributed to his democratic practices. Her words “human side to him” suggest that the principal’s thoughts and actions revolve around the interests of others. This idea finds resonance in Dewey’s (1939) belief that democracy has always been associated with humanism. Moreover, O’Hair et al. (2000) contend that democracy involves an authentic concern for others. The teachers’ responses also suggest the principal’s sensitivity towards others and his ability to bring compassion into the school environment. My observations at both of the schools revealed that the principals were warm, friendly and caring individuals with easy-going dispositions.

The foregoing discussions clearly articulate the idea that democracy is not a spectator sport (Westheimer, 2008) - it is a notion that has to be put into practice. Following the same line of thought, it can be argued that the notion of a democratic school is not something that can be achieved by observing others - instead it involves, among others, putting into practice democratic principles. In other words, there is a need to live these democratic principles, and this is what I found that the principals at both schools were attempting to do.

In summarizing the responses as to how the principals practice democracy at both the schools, many similarities were identified. At Red Star Secondary School and Excell Secondary School the principals practised sharing of ideas and of expertise. They promoted a culture of collegiality, collaboration, consultation, support, trust and respect. They also had faith in the potential of others. Both the principals emphasized the centrality of listening and also aimed at promoting the Bill of Rights as enshrined in the Constitution of the RSA. It was this notion of principals in democratic schools promoting fundamental human rights as laid out in the Constitution that was accentuated.

With this in mind, I am of the opinion that principals in democratic schools should promote the development of a culture of human rights. At Excell Secondary School the principal strived to create an environment free of discrimination. He also believed

in the right to equality. At both the schools the principals acknowledged that they are ultimately accountable for the running of the school. At Red Star Secondary School teacher 1 made reference to the principal being sensitive to the individual needs of others in the school. This response has led me to believe that perhaps we need to focus on compassion as being essential to democratic schools. From the responses with regard to how principals practice democracy in their schools, it is evident that the principals at these sites are transforming their schools into democratic environments. This finding differs from that of November et al. (2010, p. 793), whose study in South Africa revealed that principals “do not necessarily have the ability to engender democratic practices to transform their schools”.

Having briefly outlined how the principals practice democracy at their schools, I shift my attention to question three.

#### **5.4 Democratic processes**

Focusing on question three, I asked my respondents: ‘What processes are, or will you put in place to make your school democratic?’ Although the respondents were provided with the option to relate processes that they will put in place to make the school democratic, they spoke about the processes in their schools rather than what they would like to see in place. This implied that the respondents were *au fait* with democratic processes. Dimmock (1995) maintains that fundamental characteristics of democratic schools include appropriate decision-making structures, procedures and processes. At both schools all the respondents spoke about collective decision-making and voting as democratic processes. However, at Red Star Secondary School parent 1 shared her experience as a parent representative on the SGB and captured the essence of the processes that she felt contributed towards making the school democratic:

The principal does not merely encourage all stakeholders to air their views as a formality. He genuinely wishes to hear the ideas and ruminations of those involved and actually puts the suggestions of parents and learners to good practice ... Voting is an important and frequent practice at our school. (Red Star Secondary School parent 1)

Teacher 2 at the same school added that there is collective decision-making where “everyone is free to contribute for the smooth running of the school”. Teacher 2 is of the opinion that at their school others are involved in decision-making. It is evident from the parent’s response that the principal at Red Star Secondary School uses the

SGB meetings as the platform for the stakeholders to share their views and opinions. In addition, these views are not seen as tokenism but are sometimes implemented. Participative decision-making as reflected in the SASA clearly articulates the need to involve parents, teachers, community members and learners.

At Excell Secondary School the following statements from teacher 1 revealed similarities with regard to the preceding response from parent 1 at Red Star Secondary School. Teacher 1 at Excell Secondary School stated that, “there’s an open channel of communication. We believe in dialogue and discussion... He strives for consensus and therefore allows for deliberation and dialogue”. Learner 3 also shared the same opinion:

... before a decision is taken there is consultation. This consultation is not merely meant to gather individuals representing the various stakeholders. Instead this becomes the platform for exchange of ideas and opinions and this leads to shared decision-making. The process of voting is also used but mainly during the election of RCL members. (Excell Secondary School learner 3)

The learner makes reference to collective decision-making and voting as democratic processes practiced at school. From the response it can be concluded that there is collective decision-making and decision-making through consensus at Excell Secondary School, and when necessary the process of voting occurs.

In essence the respondents at Red Star Secondary School and Excell Secondary School made reference to collective decision-making, collaboration and voting.

### **5.5 Democratic structures**

Moving onto question four, the respondents were asked: ‘What structures are in place, if any, to make your school democratic?’ All of the respondents at both schools felt that there were structures in place to make the school democratic. Adopting a similar view, Maile (2002) believes that in schools structures are essential in the development of democratic practices. This question elicited markedly similar responses, one of which was expressed concisely by parent 3 at Red Star Secondary School:

I know for sure that there is the RCL, then the SGB. I’ve heard of learning area committees that create spaces for teachers involved in specific learning areas to meet and discuss as well as share ideas. Most institutions have site stewards. These are teachers who are in unions

and represent the teachers of that union on issues. (Red Star Secondary School parent 3)

At Excell Secondary School teacher 1 responded as follows:

... we have the RCL, the SGB, all our subject committees and staff reps [representatives]. We have peer mediators. These are our structures that we have in place. Our unions are also democratic structures. (Excell Secondary School teacher 1)

The teacher's response was similar to the response from Red Star Secondary School teacher 3. Although at both schools many respondents referred to learning area committees, learner 3 at Red Star Secondary School provided an interesting comment:

I am aware of learning area committees and this includes teachers who teach a specific subject. This could be democratic if they are allowed to air the views and implement decisions they have taken. (Red Star Secondary School learner 3)

The learner pointed out that only if individuals are allowed to voice their opinions and the decisions taken are implemented then could this structure be considered democratic. In other words, he is suggesting that it is pointless engaging in shared decision-making if the decisions are ultimately not implemented. From the interview responses, observations and document review at both the schools, the structures that were in place to make the school democratic included staff representatives, site stewards representing two teacher unions, a fully elected RCL, SGB, SMT, peer mediators and learning area committees which respondents referred to as subject committees.

Beane and Apple (1999) point out that democratic schools are the result of deliberate attempts to bring democracy to life. In providing opportunities for a democratic way of life, democratic structures are essential. Viewed in light of Beane and Apple's (1999) assertions, the SASA legitimizes the SGB as a democratic structure that has parent and learner representatives. According to Lefrançois and Ethier (2010), the RCLs and SGBs are clearly representative and deliberative structures that can work towards the idealized conditions of deliberative democracy. Elaborating on the aforementioned structures, November et al. (2010) transfer the focus to the principal who, they argue, must ensure that democratic structures such as the SGB, subject committees and learner representative council are properly constituted in accordance



with the SASA. The principals at both schools ensured that democratic structures were in place.

During my observations at Excell Secondary School (in the year 2010) I witnessed first-hand union representatives meeting with the principal to discuss issues regarding a major teacher's strike that was pending. At this meeting each union representative spoke openly about what plans were in place with regard to the strike. There was discussion, consultation and open dialogue. In addition, at Red Star Secondary School I was allowed to observe a SMT meeting, and it is clearly evident that the principal sought input from his management team. This meeting was characterized by dialogue, consultation, respect, openness and transparency.

At both schools peer mediators replaced the prefect system. Grade 11 learners were allowed to apply for the positions of peer mediators, and the teachers then selected the learners according to set criteria. These learners formed various committees which included among others sports, environment and learner welfare. Learners then organized activities and events for the learners of the school with guidance from teachers. These learners were not only provided with opportunities for leadership roles but were able to link the school with wider community projects like drug awareness.

I must add that the principal at Red Star Secondary School in his response included "the committees set up by learners for numerous projects such as the school's feeding scheme and the environment project". He was of the opinion that these learner committees are structures that contribute to democracy in the school and are solely learner initiatives. Although these learner committees were evident in Excell Secondary School, none of the respondents made reference to these committees in their responses to this specific question. Perhaps they were unaware that these committees contribute towards making the school democratic.

The respondents also referred to the staff representatives contributing towards democracy, and at Excell Secondary School teacher 1 from his experience as a staff representative stated:

I represent the staff at the governing body meetings. I consult with the staff first to take up matters that need to be raised at the meeting and I do a feedback after every governing body meeting. (Excell Secondary School teacher 1)

From the teacher's response it can be deduced that the teachers as major stakeholders are represented on the SGB. However, the teacher's response also provides insight into the process of consultation and representation which occurs at the school.

In summary, there were various structures at both schools that contributed to democracy. These included the RCL, the SGB, various learning area committees, staff representatives, peer mediators and unions.

### **5.6 Democratic schools and the principal**

Proceeding on to question five, I asked the respondents: 'What is your view of the role of the principal in making a school democratic?' At both schools the respondents emphasized the significant contribution of the principal in making a school democratic. The distinct role of the principal in making the school democratic was articulated and observed at both Red Star Secondary School and Excell Secondary School. Apple and Beane (2007) and Frank and Huddleston (2009) also refer to the decisive role of the principal in creating and sustaining a democratic school. They add that democratic schools have certain characteristics in common. Some of these characteristics include an open flow of ideas so that individuals are informed, faith in the potential of individuals, being able to critically reflect on issues, and being concerned about the dignity, and rights of others (Beane & Apple, 1999). In this study the data captured the aforementioned characteristics, but also included aspects like shared decision-making, the inclusion and representation of all stakeholders, the need for a shared purpose and shared vision, the need for empowering all stakeholders, integrity, trust, transparency, and the interconnectedness between the school and the community, as well as democratic schools embracing diversity.

Similarly, principals in democratic schools also have particular attributes in common (Apple & Beane, 2007; Frank & Huddleston, 2009). Moreover, Sears and Hughes (2005) point out that principals need to be committed to a set of ideas central to democracy. In addition, parent 2 at Red Star Secondary School explicitly stated the

need for commitment by the principal with regard to making the school democratic.

She remarked:

I think the principal plays a very important role in a democratic school because of his position as head of the school he is able to influence others. You can't have a situation where the principal is everything that democracy isn't- especially with promoting collective decision-making or even promoting the rights of individuals. He has to be committed. The principal cannot engage in practices that are opposite to being democratic. (Red Star Secondary School parent 2)

From the above it can be inferred that the principal should be dedicated and have faith with regard to this undertaking of creating a democratic school. From my observations, document review and interviews at Red Star Secondary School, the notion of democratic faith with regard to the principal was clearly evident. Beane and Apple (1999) refer to democratic faith, which is the underlying belief that democracy has significant meaning; it is doable and essential if we are to ensure freedom and human dignity. Although at the outset of the interview the principal at Excell Secondary School expressed disillusionment with regard to the present political scenario, he still believed that the “school is very democratic” and he added, “I firmly believe in the principles of democracy but it is something you need to constantly do”. The principal is stating that democracy in school involves a continuous process. In other words, it is not a once-off occurrence or an on again, off again process. It is for this reason that Apple and Beane (2007) elaborate that moving schools towards democratic pathways requires persistence.

In addition, the principal at Excell Secondary School claims that he believes in the democratic principles, which alludes to his democratic faith as well as to what Sears and Hughes (2005) refer to as democratic spirit. Sears and Hughes (2005) contend that the spirit of democracy has two related parts. The first involves an understanding of and commitment to (on an individual level) a set of ideas central to democracy, and the second is the disposition to function in a democratic way. With reference to the principal's response, and from my observations, it appeared that the principal was committed to democratic principles and promoting a democratic way of life in the school. This suggests that the principal perhaps embraced the spirit of democracy.

Referring to the parent's response at Red Star Secondary School, it is evident that there is a call for a move away from an autocratic leadership style to a democratic

leadership style. Teacher 1 explained:

I would also think that the personality of the principal is very important. The way he addresses people. The way he talks to people. The way he would address you as an individual. The way he would address you in a public forum. The way he would receive criticism in a meeting. Does he accept it willingly or does he lash out at you? Well we don't have that practice of our principal lashing out at others in our school. If you [are] anxious of the way he is going to react then you won't be able to have freedom of expression because you are going to be embarrassed if somebody lashes out at you publicly. Not everyone can just accept that. So it is good to know that if you want to raise a point even if it is controversial it will be received. Therefore the principal plays a fundamental role in making the school democratic. (Red Star Secondary School teacher 1)

Drawing from the teacher's explanation, it is unmistakably clear that she is of the opinion that the principal's personality influences his democratic practice, which culminates in the central role that he (the principal) plays in making a school democratic. The teacher's response also suggests that principals should not use their power and position to verbally attack or ridicule others who may have differing opinions. Instead stakeholders should be made to feel that they are part of the decision-making process and, as Furman and Starratt (2002, p. 118) point out, this may require the principal to "listen, understand, empathize, negotiate, speak, debate and resolve conflicts in a spirit of interdependence and working for the common good".

Extending the explanations put forth by teacher 1 is the principal of Red Star Secondary School who elucidated:

The principal's role in making a school democratic is multifaceted. The principal has to ensure that there is a suitable balance between ensuring that the school functions in accordance with prescribed policies while ensuring that the relevant stakeholders are an integral part of the functioning of the school ... The principal must therefore play the role of watchdog and leader in a healthy democratic institution. When the relevant role players work together as a team the principal's role becomes similar to that of the conductor of an orchestra that creates harmony. In the absence of this one can expect to experience the discordance of discontent that will eventually lead to a malfunctioning institution ... The principal must therefore realize that practising democracy is not a matter of choice but a matter of necessity ... (Red Star Secondary School principal)

The preceding response from the principal at Red Star Secondary School suggests that the principal has a wide-ranging role in making a school democratic. Although it is important to ensure that the various stakeholders contribute to the functioning of the school, of equal importance is the need to conform to the policies set out by the DoE. For this reason the principal is responsible for not only leading a democratic organization but for overseeing and preserving democracy in the school. Most importantly, practising democracy (as noted by the principal) is an unavoidable need. This response is consistent with the argument put forth by Bäckman and Trafford (2007, p. 6), who concur that without the active support of the principal “democracy is unlikely to take root and grow”. Simply stated, the principal plays a fundamental role in creating a democratic school.

The ever-changing, proactive role of the principal as both leader and facilitator in making a school democratic is aptly encapsulated in the response by the principal at Red Star Secondary School:

The principal’s role is therefore dynamic in that he/she must consistently track prevailing conditions at the school and make the necessary interventions when necessary in order to ensure that the school is run democratically. This means that the principal needs to play a major role as facilitator and leader rather than merely as a manager. (Red Star Secondary School principal)

The responses from the principal at Red Star Secondary School suggest that the principal plays a key role that is multi-faceted. More was revealed when he added:

The principal plays a dynamic role in leading a democratic school. It is therefore important to be constantly aware of the extent to which the school is functioning democratically or failing to do so. My role as leader is therefore in ensuring that the school has the necessary structures, policies and vision to grow as a democratic institution. This would call for inspirational leadership and a firm commitment to ensuring that the principles of democracy are an integral part of both the operational and strategic aspects of school management. (Red Star Secondary School principal)

The foregoing response suggests that even though the principal may be committed to the process of moving the school to become more democratic, it is vital to assess where on the continuum from less democratic to more democratic the school is positioned. The principal is honest enough to state that it is possible for a school not to be functioning democratically. He also points out that it is necessary for democratic

principles to be filtered through to the day-to-day running of the school. The principal's response has relevance once again to Bäckman and Trafford's (2007) four stages in democratic development that might be discernible in a school, from stage one where there is no trace of democratic activity to stage four, which (to them) is an advanced form of living.

The principal also believed that it is his responsibility to ensure that the necessary structures are in place so as to contribute towards the development of democracy in the institution. Hess and Johnson (2010) and November et al. (2010) concur that the principal has to ensure that structures are in place to advance democratic practice. Drawing from the fourth interview question, the principals at both of the schools had structures like the SGB, RCL and learning area committees to advance democratic practices.

Finally I was amazed at the response from learner 1, an African female at Excell Secondary School, who provided a different dimension to the role of the principal as she stated, "I think he plays a key role because - like in the school we are all a big family and he's the head of the family". Surprisingly, at the same school teacher 1 and teacher 3 provided a similar response about the school community working as a family. Teacher 3 an African male stated: "You have to be the principal first – you the man in charge- you are the head of the institution. You are the father and you should also be a problem solver". From this perspective the school is viewed as a social unit, and traditionally in a patriarchal society the father is seen as the head generally providing for the family and supporting the household. Thus the respondents extend this idea of the principal playing this vital leadership role.

From all of the responses at both of the schools, of particular note was that they spoke the same language with regard to affirming the pivotal role of the principal in making a school democratic. Besides this, respondents at both of the schools felt that the principals needed to be committed to democracy in the schools.

## **5.7 Conclusion**

In this chapter I presented and discussed the responses to questions one to five from the common interview schedule. My discussion was enhanced through an integration

of the field notes captured during my observations as well as data from the document review. In concluding this chapter I succinctly refer to some of the findings. There was a shared language with regard to the notion of democratic schools. The rich descriptions of democratic schools revealed convincing evidence for me to believe that the principals at both of the case study schools were moving towards becoming 'democratically minded'. Surprisingly within the notion of democratic schools, the respondents attached very little emphasis to the voting process but instead focused on democratic principles.

With regard to the notion of democratic schools at Red Star Secondary School and Excell Secondary School, the respondents referred to various core democratic principles. In line with this finding, I point out that democracy can be viewed as the embodiment of principles (Adams & Waghid, 2005) and as such democratic schools are founded on as well as reflect democratic principles (Kelly, 1995; Mncube & Harber, 2010; Kensler, 2010). Taking this idea further, Kelly (1995) adds that anyone who proclaims adherence to democracy has to be committed to its principles. A common thread running through all the responses was the idea of all stakeholders being involved in decision-making, thus accentuating the idea of shared decision-making in a democratic school.

Beane and Apple (1999) elaborate that in a democratic school all those involved in the school have the right to participate in the decision-making process. Other core democratic principles mentioned by the respondents included the inclusion of all stakeholders in shared decision-making, the need for shared purpose and shared vision. Both of the schools advanced the notion of democratic schools promoting critical thinking, openness, and respecting the rights and dignity of all individuals and the need for empowering all stakeholders. The principals at both of the schools frequently referred to the Constitution wherein the core democratic principles are enshrined, suggesting that these schools are attempting to model these fundamental principles and as such what I term 'live the Constitution'.

It follows that the principals at both of the case study schools felt that they practice democracy in their institutions. Similarly, the teachers, parents and learners also felt that their principals practiced democracy. The principals' practices of democracy

were connected to their enunciated understanding of democratic schools, and again they appeared to be living out the core democratic principles. At Red Star Secondary School and Excell Secondary School the principals practiced sharing of ideas and expertise. They promoted a culture of collegiality, collaboration, consultation, support, trust and respect. They also had faith in the potential of others. Both of the principals emphasized the centrality of listening and also aimed at promoting the Bill of Rights as enshrined in the Constitution of the RSA.

Democratic processes and democratic structures are essential in the development of democratic practices (Maile, 2002). At Red Star Secondary School and Excell Secondary School respondents made reference to collective decision-making, collaboration and voting as democratic processes. Dimmock (1995) maintains that fundamental characteristics of democratic schools include appropriate decision-making structures, procedures and processes. November et al. (2010) affirm that the principal must ensure that democratic structures are in place. The principals at both of the schools in my study ensured that various structures like the RCL, SGB and learning area committees were in place to promote democracy. The respondents believed that staff representatives, site stewards representing teacher unions and peer mediators also contributed to democracy in the school environment. This accentuates the shared language with regard to the central role of the principal in making a school democratic.

Apple and Beane (2007) and Frank and Huddleston (2009) also refer to the decisive role of the principal in creating and sustaining a democratic school. I firmly believe that democratic schools require the full support of the principal and this argument is reinforced by Bäckman and Trafford (2007, p. 6), who purport that without the active support of the principal “democracy is unlikely to take root and grow”.

Having presented and discussed the responses to the initial five questions from the common interview questions, I move on to Chapter Six to present and discuss the responses to the final six interview questions. Again I emphasize that data collected from the observations and document review were used to corroborate my findings.



## **CHAPTER SIX: DATA PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION - CREATING, LEADING AND GOVERNING DEMOCRATIC SCHOOLS; TEACHING METHODS AND CURRICULUM CONSISTENT WITH DEMOCRACY**

### **6.1 Introductory remarks**

Data presentation and discussion in Chapter Five focused on the first five questions that appeared in the common interview schedule. Chapter Six continues with the data presentation and discussion, prioritizing questions six to eleven from the common interview schedule. As stated in Chapter Five, each interview question dealt with a specific aspect and it is for this reason that broad headings were used. For coherence and consistency, each interview question is again introduced under a general heading. The responses obtained from the interview questions six to eleven contribute to addressing research question three of this study: How do principals create, lead and govern schools democratically? I reiterate that data from the observations and document review are used to substantiate my findings.

### **6.2 Creating a democratic school**

For question six I posed the following question to the principal: ‘How do you create a democratic school?’ The interviewees other than the principal were asked: ‘How does your principal create a democratic school?’ This question that focused on how the principal creates a democratic school elicited varied responses, but the respondents shared common ideas. At the outset it is important to consider the statements made by the principal of Excell Secondary School, who asserted that,

The role of the principal is to create the conditions in which democracy thrives ... But in a nutshell it is important that as a leader you create the conditions for democracy to prevail. You ensure that democratic principles are followed. (Excell Secondary School principal)

The principal was resolute in his belief that the role of the principal extended to creating an environment in which democracy flourishes. In doing so it was essential to put into practice democratic principles. Elaborating on this point Red Star Secondary School parent 2, stated:

From my experience with the principal, he is definitely creating a democratic school by creating a democratic environment in school. I think the fact that spaces or platforms are created during parent meetings for parents to air their views is also important. He tries to get

all role players involved in decision-making. (Red Star Secondary School parent 2)

Other respondents also echoed the same view of the principal encouraging shared decision-making in creating a democratic school. Beane and Apple (1999) substantiate this view by elaborating that in a democratic school all those involved in the school have the right to participate in the decision-making process. This frequent reference to shared decision-making reinforces the need for collective decision-making in a democratic school, and this shared decision-making is linked to shared purpose. This is articulated by teacher 1 at Red Star Secondary School, who claimed that her principal:

... has respect for others, he encourages freedom of speech and ensures fairness ... Our principal ensures that decisions and issues are discussed at various levels before it is implemented. He believes in transparency. We are always reminded of our shared purpose and vision so that all stakeholders know where they are heading ... He takes into consideration children's rights and the teachers' rights ... There is no nepotism. Everybody is treated equally. (Red Star Secondary School teacher 1)

From the teacher's statements it is evident that in creating a democratic school the principal promotes freedom of speech, strives to be fair and transparent and works within the context of the individual's rights. The preceding response has a direct bearing on the Bill of Rights as enshrined in the Constitution of the RSA. Section 39 (1a) of the Bill of Rights accentuates the need to promote values like human dignity, equality and freedom, which the teacher alludes to (RSA, 1996a). The principal of Red Star Secondary School also went on to refer specifically to the Bill of Rights:

The Bill of Rights which forms Chapter Two of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa should be the guiding light when creating conditions for a democratic school. (Red Star Secondary School principal)

According to the principal at Red Star Secondary School, creating a democratic school involves working within the framework of the Bill of Rights. The principal refers to the Bill of Rights as it is a cornerstone of democracy in South Africa and aims at protecting the rights of all individuals in the country.

Teacher 1 at Excell Secondary School provided an interesting response:

I think the most important criteria here is trust. If he has trust in his ... teachers, as is the case with our school, obviously he will be able to

achieve whatever goals the school is trying to achieve. For me trust is the important criteria. By allowing these things that we have discussed earlier on, like open communication, respect, transparency, shared decision-making to happen he creates a positive atmosphere or environment that is conducive to practice democracy. (Excell Secondary School teacher 1)

Teacher 1 makes reference to trust as an essential aspect in creating a democratic school. Learner 3, parent 1 and teacher 2 also mentioned the principal having trust in others. I believe interpersonal trust also contributes to open communication. According to teacher 1 trust is the basis for achieving the school's vision, which in a democratic school should be a collective vision. At Red Star Secondary School parent 3 referred to professional trust. In affirming the need for trust Bryk and Schneider (2003) add that collective decision-making is facilitated through strong relational trust. Moreover, teacher 1 states that the principal promotes democratic principles like open communication, respect and transparency, which contribute towards a positive environment that in turn allows for democracy to be practiced by all. The teacher went on to add:

In our school we have a shared purpose which is expressed in the vision and mission statement and which has been agreed upon by all stakeholders. With this shared purpose and vision we are able to work as a team. Our principal emphasizes teamwork. He also encourages us to utilize our talents. He compliments us on tasks that are well executed and so we feel appreciated and valued. He actually gives us letters of appreciation on tasks or projects completed. Our suggestions are most often valued. (Excell Secondary School teacher 1)

Teacher 1 at Red Star Secondary School as well Excell Secondary School teacher 1 referred to shared purpose, and in the preceding response the teacher spoke about teamwork which he felt was used by the principal in creating a democratic school.

Within this notion of teamwork, both democratic leadership (Prinsloo, 2003) and distributed leadership (Stoll & Temperley, 2008) accentuate teamwork. It is not surprising that, according to the teacher, staff members are encouraged to utilize their expertise. This also suggests that the principal does not feel threatened by the skills of others. He perhaps feels that the expertise of others could be of benefit to the school and to others. In keeping with this line of thought, Leithwood et al. (2006) assert that distributed leadership increases opportunities for a school to benefit from the expertise of the various individuals in the organization, and as such it capitalizes on

the strengths of its members.

Moreover, the principal's gesture in showing his appreciation for tasks that were well executed made them feel valued. In a report (dated 3 May 2010) to the HoD of Technology at Excell Secondary School the principal of the school stated: "Your support and willingness to assist in your department and general staff is very much appreciated. Further, your ideas and suggestions are always welcome and refreshing". This action by the principal clearly suggests that he has moved away from the notion of a one-man team and draws on the expertise of others; he sees others as contributing to the functioning of the school. In the minutes of an internal department meeting at Excell Secondary School reference was made to "sharing best practices", thus accentuating the idea of teamwork and collaboration.

During the interview the principal of Excell Secondary School also said, "There's team effort in terms of us sharing good practice, visiting other schools, inviting other schools". Similarly, Dobozy (2007) explains that in transforming their schools from traditional institutions to democratic learning communities, principals extend their practices so as to become more inclusive. Teachers are encouraged to share their practices with others and in so doing promote collaboration. The school also starts including those outside the school, thus interacting with the local community.

With regard to Excell Secondary School the principal extended the idea of sharing best practices with other schools in the area. Teacher 3 stated:

He is the person that is an information seeker. He visits other schools which are better than us ... He looks at how they do the things. How the schools are run and then he will come with some of the things and try to implement them here with support from his teachers. (Excell Secondary School Teacher 3)

Teacher 3 affirms that the principal facilitates sharing of best practice. The idea of sharing best practices sets into motion collaboration, communication and consultation. Although the idea of collaboration is accentuated, it is evident that the principal sees the school as being part of a broader community. This is in line with John Dewey's (1916) thinking that democracy involves relating to others and interacting with others in the community. Thus the school is not viewed in isolation. Consistent with this line

of thought is the argument put forth by Goodlad et al. (2004); in emphasizing the interrelatedness of the school and the community, they posit that schools are indelibly linked to the communities in which they are located. However, I am of the opinion that it is necessary to forge authentic school-community partnerships that strive for mutual support and common goals.

During my observations I also noted that both of the principals used the collective pronouns 'we' and 'our'. At the SMT meeting which I was privileged to observe, the principal at Red Star Secondary School often asked the management team to air their opinions, as evident in the following statement: "Is that what we are saying? Please ladies and gentleman let's talk". It is evident that the principal was inviting communication, encouraging dialogue and thereby allowing others to contribute to the issue at hand, thus creating the perception of openness with regard to communication. The use of the word 'we' again implies that it is a collective viewpoint.

In an urgent memo sent out (18 May 2009) to the teachers and the SMT at Excell Secondary School, the principal, who was addressing inappropriate classroom management issues that he had observed, stated that the memo was a "friendly reminder". He listed practices that he felt should be happening as "Getting it right" and not as "you should be doing the following". In concluding his memo he wrote "Working together we will get it right". Again he used the word 'we', even when blame could be apportioned to specific individuals. In concluding his year-end report this principal stated that, "The governing body must be acknowledged for their support, encouragement and motivation. This has helped to develop a wonderful team spirit" (Excell Secondary School Year End Report<sup>5</sup>, 2008). The idea of working together is once again highlighted. Beane and Apple (1999) posit that democratic schools are centred on the notion of "we". The principal of Red Star Secondary appositely elaborates that, "The principal must aim for democracy in action rather than setting up a one-man show that is in conflict with group interests".

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<sup>5</sup> At Excell Secondary School the Year End Report 2008 refers to the annual end of year report provided by the principal.

Teacher 1 at Excell Secondary School spoke at length about the school environment that played a fundamental role in creating a democratic school. The teacher elaborated:

There is a spirit of democracy in our school and this influences the school environment, school climate, school ethos and school culture as a whole. The principal with his spirit of trust and honesty influences the ethos of the school. In other words his positive vibe has a positive effect on the school. The atmosphere in our school reflects warmth and friendliness. There is a collaborative culture. Our interactions are also characterized by light humour and our teachers work as a family. Yes that is it. (Excell Secondary School teacher 1)

According to the teacher the principal's ability to trust others and his emphasis on honesty contributes to the school culture. Essentially it is the principal's positive energy that permeates the school. Teacher 1 refers to the collaborative culture, warmth and friendliness in the school, and from my observations this was indeed evident. The response from teacher 1 at Excell Secondary School suggests that the principal, through his positive interactions that are characterized by trust, honesty and warmth, had created an environment for democracy to grow. Similarly, Jenlink and Jenlink (2008) appositely remind us that democracy does not just happen – rather, it is created through experiences shared by all individuals of a community.

From the teacher's response the notion of the school as a family unit was resonated and learner 1 and teacher 3 at the same school (Excell Secondary) also articulated this idea (as discussed in interview question five in Chapter Five). This suggests that the some of the teachers and learners viewed themselves as a family unit, within the confines of the school perhaps trying to share a common culture and a common way of life. Parent 1 at Red Star Secondary had a similar view, as she claimed that, "The principal has certainly instilled a sense of togetherness". Parent 2 at the same school also mentioned that the principal "creates a feeling of togetherness". With this in mind I refer to Bryan and Hayes (2010), who advise that creating caring relationships contributes to a democratic environment and at both the schools I got a feeling of a caring school environment.

In addition, my observations revealed that the informal chats between teachers, teacher and principal, teacher and learner, teacher and parent as well as principal and parent were pleasant. These positive interactions that were characterized by respect

contributed to the positive school environment. Consistent with this finding Genç (2008) maintains that principals should create a democratic educational environment, which in turn will contribute to the progress of a democratic school. In creating a democratic school the principal of Excell Secondary School made the following comments:

Number one, everybody has a right to be heard. You listen. Because everybody in terms of the Constitution has a right to be heard ... But also expect and make people aware that having had a right to be heard we also have a right and responsibility to heed the decisions of the majority ... Practice consultation. Create that culture ... Practice an open-door policy ... You must be fair. In my experiences as principal you might not be liked but people will respect you if the rule for one is a rule for all - that's very important. (Excell Secondary School principal)

The preceding response provides insight into how the principal at Excell Secondary School was creating a democratic school, and this includes listening to the various stakeholders, and consulting with others, and in so doing developing and nurturing a consultative culture, being non-discriminatory and unbiased. These aspects were also evident during my observation as the principal was always willing to listen to parents, learners, support staff and teachers. Parent 1 at Excell Secondary School also explained:

There is an open flow of communication. Debate and dialogue is encouraged. From my experience in the SGB extensive debate and dialogue takes place. (Excell Secondary School parent 1)

The parent's response suggests that in creating a democratic school the principal encourages deliberation and parent 2 added,

Decisions that are made are first discussed extensively. There's dialogue and there should be some agreement to the decision taken. There is exchange of ideas. So there is participative decision-making. (Excell Secondary School parent 2)

Parent 2 also alluded to some form of deliberation. Ross (2004) points out that deliberation is the heart of democracy itself. Meier (2003) adds that a democratic school culture has a lot of human interaction, thus referring to communication and participation with regard to the stakeholders. Taking the idea of democratic school culture further, Knight and Pearl (2000) maintain that a democratic school culture not only embraces participation but inclusiveness, human rights and decisions founded on knowledge and reason.

My observations and interview responses allowed me to confirm that the principals promoted a culture of collegiality, collaboration, support and trust. At this point I find it pertinent to refer to Apple and Beane (2007), who contend that principals in democratic schools need to have an understanding of culture. They need to know that democracy should permeate every aspect of school life. From the preceding discussion and verbatim responses it is evident that the principals at both of the schools were attempting to develop democratic school cultures with emphasis on promoting collegiality, communication, participation, human rights, collaboration, support and trust.

With regard to the open-door policy, although it implies having direct access to the head of the institution these principals' office doors were literally open throughout the school day, and only when discussing extremely sensitive or confidential issues did I see the doors closed. I also witnessed first-hand at Excell Secondary School a senior teacher asking for leave and being granted the leave but being reminded by the principal to complete the necessary leave records, suggesting that irrespective of seniority the rules applied to all teachers. Stated succinctly this also implies that the principal was advancing the idea of one set of rules for all.

In summary, both of the case study schools promoted shared decision-making with an emphasis on shared purpose and trust. Both of the principals practiced an open-door policy. In creating a democratic school the principal at Excell Secondary School claimed that adherence to democratic principles is necessary. At Red Star Secondary School the principal extended this idea by stating that in creating a democratic school it is important to work within the framework of the Bill of Rights. Teacher 1 at Excell Secondary School felt that the principal "creates a positive atmosphere or environment that is conducive to practice democracy". The teacher also spoke about a collaborative culture and teamwork. He went on to add that the principal encourages deliberation. At Red Star Secondary School the parent explained that the principal instills a sense of togetherness, while the learner and teacher representatives at Excell Secondary School used the analogy of the school as a family unit. At both of the schools democratic cultures appeared to be taking root as the principals promoted collegiality, communication, participation, human rights, collaboration, support and trust.



### 6.3 A democratic curriculum

With regard to question seven the respondents were asked: ‘Please explain how democratic principles are integrated into your school curriculum.’ Although parents at both of the schools felt that they were not qualified to comment on the curriculum, they did provide responses. Some of the parents insisted that they knew very little about the new curriculum.

At both of the schools respondents did agree that the curriculum is a democratic one. Expanding on the notion of a democratic curriculum, parent 2 at Excell Secondary School explained:

I know in the past especially when I was in school we learners were only taught about white South African history. The whites were portrayed positively unlike other race groups that were made to appear in a negative light. Presently learners are taught about heroes and heroines from diverse backgrounds and cultures. The curriculum allows for various social issues within the community to be explored. I think the curriculum allows learners to work together thereby promoting the idea of togetherness or cohesiveness. Various social issues are integrated into the curriculum making knowledge relevant and meaningful. (Excell Secondary School parent 2)

The parent is openly relating her experience as a learner during the apartheid era. She describes how the apartheid curriculum propagated the idea of white supremacy. At Red Star Secondary School parent 2 shared a similar view and argued that, “Content is not biased or favours a particular group as in the past”. Naicker (2006) elaborates that the South African apartheid education doctrine emphasized control and an authoritarian approach to teaching and learning. Thus unlike education during the apartheid years that perpetuated separateness, was teacher-centred and content driven, OBE, the National Curriculum Statement and even the National Curriculum Assessment Policy Statement (2011) aims at democratizing South African society.

However, respondents acknowledged that there is a prescribed curriculum. The principal of Excell Secondary School provided the following response:

Now within the confines of the school curriculum, there is nothing much that you can do with the curriculum because it is a set curriculum. What you can do is look at how you can integrate these democratic principles within this curriculum ... (Excell Secondary School principal)

On the same note, the principal at Red Star Secondary School explained:

On reflection it must be stated that the teaching of the various subjects at the school follow the prescription set by the National and Provincial Departments of Education and the principles of democracy often take second place to syllabus completion and assessment policies. Thus far there is no platform for parents, learners or even the rank and file educators to make inputs into curriculum construction. This lack of a consultative process into curriculum design makes it difficult at a school level to implement principles... However, educators are encouraged to make room for learner inputs and to motivate learners to participate actively in lessons. (Red Star Secondary School principal)

At both of the schools the principals stated emphatically that the curriculum is a prescribed one. They believed that schools adhere to a State-regulated curriculum that focuses primarily on criterion-referenced testing and learner performance. According to Frank and Huddleston (2009), over-emphasis on learner assessment, as well as teacher evaluation, all place practical restrictions on what can be achieved by the learners. However, teachers can strive for maximum interaction and collaboration with learners, as well as integrating democratic practices in normal day-to-day activities. Although the principal at Excell Secondary School felt that democratic principles could be integrated into the curriculum, the principal at Red Star Secondary School felt that it is difficult to integrate democratic principles into the curriculum because completing the syllabus and assessments are given priority.

In addition, the principal at Red Star Secondary School stated that learner involvement during lessons is encouraged. However, it must be pointed out that the National Curriculum Statement is structured so as to reflect democratic principles enshrined in the Constitution of the RSA. Rooth (2005, p. 36) concurs that, “The founding principles of C2005 were drawn from the new South African Constitution, ... with its emphasis on human rights, equity, redress, inclusivity, social and environmental justice and access”. However, all of the respondents, with the exception of learner 1 at Excell Secondary School, felt strongly that the current curriculum was prescriptive; the principal at Red Star Secondary School referred to the “lack of a consultative process into curriculum design”. In other words, he was suggesting that the various stakeholders (namely the parents, learners and teachers) did not engage in the design of the curriculum.

Learner 3 at Red Star Secondary School aptly commented:

Our curriculum and assessments are not aspects that we as learners can negotiate. I think or rather I have heard that learners in specific grades need to cover certain content as these are what the department of education requires. So basically we have to learn the content that our teachers go through. I know that teachers tell grade 12 learners that they have to go through certain content because what if it appears in the final paper. In terms of the curriculum I don't think even parents and teachers have much say in it. (Red Star Secondary School learner 3)

The learner states that there's no input on curriculum and assessments. Consistent with the preceding arguments Barr (2007) in an international study found that in public schools learners did not have a lot of input into what they learned. However, there was a lot of input into how they learned. Also, Mncube and Harber (2010) in their study make reference to a democratic curriculum and to the right of learners to negotiate the curriculum. In Mncube & Harber (2010) teachers in the sample schools felt that learners should have a say in issues concerning their teaching and learning, as this contributes to a democratic curriculum.

With regard to stakeholder input in the curriculum, Van Wyk (2007) confirms that in South Africa the SGB has very little influence over curriculum issues. Van Wyk (2007) reports that parents believe they have very little knowledge of curriculum issues, and for this very reason are reluctant to contribute to such matters. Similar responses were received from parents at both Red Star Secondary School and Excell Secondary School. Parent 1 at Excell Secondary School felt that, "the voice of the learner and parent should be included in respect of the curriculum". The respondent's statement suggests that parents and learners should be involved not only in the implementation of the curriculum but in the planning as well. This finding is consistent with Mncube and Harber's (2010) study, where teachers felt that the learner voice should be included in issues related to teaching and learning. Noddings (1997) also affirms that learners should be co-creators of the curriculum.

However, teacher 1 at Red Star Secondary School elaborated:

Although we have a prescribed curriculum we need to teach in such a way that our teaching is in context with the real world. The relevance of it is there for them - for the learners ... I think it is also very important for the learning content to be placed in context with the real world. You know wherever you can as a teacher you need to link with

the real – like things need to be taught in context – so it becomes more relevant to the child. (Red Star Secondary School teacher 1)

The teacher emphasizes the need to link classroom teaching and the knowledge acquired to the real-world experiences. Other respondents in both the schools mentioned the need to link the content to experiences of the real world. Teacher 2 at Red Star Secondary School succinctly stated this: “The content includes knowledge that is relevant and meaningful to the learners - topics like HIV/AIDS and global warming are included”. From the aforementioned responses it can be deduced that there is a need to link aspects in the curriculum to the real-life world so that it becomes meaningful to the learner. Further, Mncube and Harber (2010) and Wringe (1984) assert that the content of the curriculum should be of relevance to the lives and experiences of the learners. Extending this argument are Beane and Apple (1999), who affirm that the curriculum should include not only issues that adults think are important but also aspects that concern learners as well. In addition, Kelly (1995) argues that a democratic curriculum should be both common to all as well as suitable for all.

Teacher 1 at Red Star Secondary School added, “I think that learners must always be given a fair chance to be able to express themselves. They must be received with dignity”. In other words, learners must be provided with the opportunity to air their views and should be treated with respect. A similar line of thought is expressed by Nugent and Mooney (2008, p. 2), who posit that democratic schools recognize the value and rights of each individual and “promotes the idea that every child should have the right to express an opinion, and to have that opinion taken into account”. Mncube and Harber (2010) concur that a democratic curriculum acknowledges the right of learners with alternative viewpoints to have their opinions heard. The teacher also stated that they are facilitators in the learning process and learners are active participants in the classroom. This statement suggests a transformation in the teacher’s role. There is a shift from merely transmitting knowledge (Print et al., 2002), as evident in the apartheid years, to a role as facilitator in the learning process. Thus the teacher’s statement has a direct bearing on OBE with its emphasis on learner-centredness.

Teacher 1 also pointed out that, “the learner has changed from like 10, 15 years ago”. The point made by the teacher has relevance when analyzing the comments made by learner 1 of Red Star Secondary School, who explained:

From the time I know teachers have always had a set assessment for us. We couldn't really give an input because it was already set for us. It's something we know we have to follow and do. Like the curriculum is already set - many of our projects and assignments are already set for us ... But things like dates and how to go about things we ask and we vote on it. Like decisions like that we vote for in class like (err). Like with democracy majority rules. (Red Star Secondary School learner 1)

Although the notion of a set curriculum is articulated, the learner brings in another dimension of learner input on a certain aspect in teaching and learning. It is evident that 10 or even 15 years ago learners would have hesitated about making decisions on the date for handing in assignments. At Red Star Secondary School the learners actually vote on issues like these, and although these may appear as minor issues, the fact is that learners are engaged in democratic practices. Learner 2 at the same school also mentioned that dates for assessments could be negotiated. This was also the case at Excell Secondary School. Interestingly, learner 1 at Red Star Secondary School stated: “Like with democracy majority rules”. This implies that the learners are aware of the principle of majority rule (Schoeman, 2005) and adhere to it.

Teacher 1 at Excell Secondary School stated:

Trust, participation, freedom of expression, collaboration, transparency, critical thinking, and sharing of responsibilities, these are all the criteria that are prevalent in our school and lends itself to an integrated curriculum. Perhaps of most importance is that learners are treated with respect. In our school learners are encouraged to air their views and this gives them a sense of value ... As teachers we encourage the learners to think critically. We encourage dialogue and discussion. Our teachers try to encourage debate. (Excell Secondary School teacher 1)

The teacher at Excell Secondary School refers to an integrated curriculum and lists various democratic principles that are practiced in the school, and goes on to state that these principles can be integrated into the curriculum. According to the teacher, learners are treated with respect and debate, dialogue and discussion are encouraged. The teacher also claims that freedom of expression is encouraged and learners are encouraged to think critically. Some of the principles on which the CAPS (DoE, 2011) are based include human rights as well as active and critical learning.

At both of the schools respondents commented on the curriculum promoting critical thinking. Excell Secondary School parent 2 maintained:

The curriculum encourages critical analysis. The emphasis is on higher order thinking, rather than merely spewing out facts without really understanding the actual content. (Excell Secondary School parent 2)

The parent stated categorically that the curriculum promotes critical thinking and learner 2 at the same school stated: “We are always given problems and asked to provide solutions”. At Red Star Secondary School learner 2 also affirmed that, “The learners are encouraged to participate in the lessons, in the discussions... There’s a lot of critical thinking that is required...” In other words, the learners are encouraged to think critically.

In her response Red Star Secondary School parent 3 referred to the apartheid curriculum:

In the past when we were in school we had to write answers – word for word as it was given to us by our teachers. Even if we did not understand the content but we replicated the content given to us by our teachers ... we got full marks. But these days learners have to solve problems, analyze and think critically... this is good as we want our children to be able to think for themselves. (Red Star Secondary School parent 3)

The parent refers to rote memorization that was encouraged in the past. She also acknowledges that the present curriculum encourages thought processes that promote deeper thinking. The curriculum aims at developing learners into critical thinkers who would analyze, engage in problem solving and contribute to a democratic society (Van der Horst & McDonald, 1997). Moreover, Frank and Huddleston (2009) posit that the existence of democracy is dependent on individuals who are articulate and who can think critically. They (Frank & Huddleston, 2009) add that critical thinking and the skills of discussion and debate, including advocacy, argument and negotiation, can be developed in almost any learning area. Moss (2007) elaborates that democratic practice involves encouraging critical thinking, as well as acknowledging various perspectives and diverse paradigms with regard to understanding the world. Moreover, Campbell (1999) concurs that a democratic curriculum involves being critical of what is read, seen or heard. In essence teacher 1 at Excell Secondary School claims that learners are encouraged to “think out of the box”. In addition, as mentioned OBE emphasizes learner-centredness, the active

participation of learners and critical thinking (Van der Horst & McDonald, 1997). These are the criteria that the teacher referred to without actually mentioning OBE or a democratic curriculum. Most importantly at both of the schools learners referred to democratic principles that were integrated in teaching and learning to include respect, open communication, the right to freedom of expression and critical thinking.

In summing up, at both of the case study schools there was a perception that not much could be done with the curriculum, since it is a set one. At Red Star Secondary School teacher 1 felt that there is a need to link aspects in the curriculum to the real-life world so that it becomes meaningful to the learner. Although the principal at Excell Secondary School felt that democratic principles could be integrated into the curriculum, the principal at Red Star Secondary School felt that it is difficult to integrate democratic principles into the curriculum because of the need to complete the syllabus and assessments. Teacher 1 at Excell Secondary School believed that the school encourages debate, dialogue, discussion, freedom of expression and critical thinking. Although learners referred to set assessments, some learners indicated that they provide input with regard to the dates for assessments.

#### **6.4 Democratic teaching methods**

For question eight the respondents were asked: ‘Please explain how the teaching methods utilized in your school are consistent with democracy.’ Steyn et al. (2004, p. 76) distinguish between traditional teaching methods and progressive methods that include more democratic teaching methods. Teaching methods that are consistent with democracy focus on learner-centredness. However, the principal of Excell Secondary School felt that, “the whole issue of learner-centredness is good in theory but difficult to put into practice” and the principal at Red Star Secondary School stated:

... Educators are prone to following the trend of syllabus completion and prescribed assessment requirements rather than allowing room for the principles of democracy. Other factors such as large classes and coping with diversity in the classroom have apparently hampered educators from utilizing teaching methods consistent with democracy. At the core of the problem, however, is a mindset and practice that has established the educator as the font of wisdom and transmitter of knowledge while the learner is a passive receiver. In order for democracy to thrive it will be necessary for learners to play a more active role in lessons. While in certain subjects such as in the languages, Arts and Culture learners have the opportunity within the

confines of the subject to express themselves freely, there is very little room for democratic teaching practices as educators engage in the rush to complete syllabus and complete assessments for grade progression purposes. However, educators are aware that learners must be given the opportunity to participate in lessons and be given the space to express their ideas within the context of the lesson. (Red Star Secondary School principal)

Basically the principal, who does not carry a teaching load and is therefore not a classroom practitioner, believes that teachers are so caught up in the furore of completing a set curriculum and prescribed assessments and are therefore unable to find time to utilize teaching methods that are consistent with democracy. He also feels that teachers still believe that they are transmitters of knowledge and the learners are merely passive recipients of the knowledge. Extending this point are Steyn et al. (2004, p. 76), who refer to traditional teaching methods that involved “the information transmission approach to teaching”. Thus the principal opines that teachers are still using traditional teaching methods. However, according to the principal, the teachers are aware that they should be providing the learners with the opportunity to express their views. This implies that the teachers are aware that they should be moving away from traditional teaching methods towards democratic teaching strategies.

The learners, parents and two teachers from Red Star Secondary School felt differently. They believed that teaching and learning at the school was learner-centred. Teacher 3 claimed that teaching and learning was more learner-centred but at “times there is greater effort on the part of the teacher to explain ... Then there I would expect the class not to be writing. Just listening and trying to grasp my explanation”. This teacher felt there were occasions for the teacher to do all the talking and the learners to be engaged in listening thus implying there is some teacher-centredness. However, the same teacher claimed that, “Learners are taught to think critically and expose their thoughts and views with justifications...” The teacher’s response suggests a move away from rote memorization and regurgitation of facts to a higher level of thinking.

However, the learner at the school responded:

There is definitely equality in the classroom and there is a lot of interaction in the classroom between the teachers and the learners. The learners are encouraged to participate in the lessons, in the discussions.



When lessons are being taught there's a lot of talking going on. The teachers sometimes also learn from the learners when it comes to some areas. (Red Star Secondary School learner 2)

From the learner's response it is evident that the lessons are to some extent learner-centred. Interestingly, the learner points out that teachers also learn from the learners in the class. He refers to discussion, participation and interaction, thus implying that there is a move away from teacher-centred lessons. At this juncture I must point out that democracy requires participative classrooms. In line with the preceding statements, Print et al. (2002) refer to the transformation of the teacher's role. They argue that instead of merely transmitting knowledge to the learners, as was evident in the past, teachers focus on organizing the teaching-learning environment to encourage dialogue. Topics are discussed, the learners articulate their views and are taught to respect the views of others.

I was concerned that this practice of interaction, debates and dialogue during lessons could be intermittent, so I questioned a learner as to whether this practice was once-off. Her response was:

I think because we practice democracy so often, because it's implemented so often it has become part of who we are. I don't think it is a once-off thing - that - okay this is democracy and we practice it in the classroom and I'm never going to go back to it again. It is something that is being slowly instilled in us. (Red Star Secondary School learner 1)

What the learner is clearly stating is that they are exposed to democratic practices in the classrooms and this is gradually becoming part of them. Moreover, earlier in the interview the learner also stated: "... it's democracy in practice every day". She alludes to the notion of lived democracy and it is apparent that democracy is being extended beyond the classroom. Extending this idea are Steyn et al. (2004), who maintain that democratic teaching styles assist not only in creating a democratic culture but also promote a democratic way of thinking in learners.

Teacher 1, being a seasoned teacher at the same school, stated:

In the classrooms the channels of communication are more open as compared to previously ... We encourage dialogue and ensure that the channels of communication are always open. The learner and the educator are able to communicate with each other and express themselves. Learning is learner-centred rather than teacher-centred.

Teachers are thus seen as facilitators in the learning process. (Red Star Secondary School teacher 1)

The teacher stated clearly that learning is learner-centred and teachers have moved beyond merely transmitting knowledge, and parent 1 claimed:

The teachers at Red Star Secondary School believe that in order to instill democracy within the very framework of the school it is important to allow learners to express themselves in an honest and uninhibited manner ... Discussion is encouraged and learners engage in healthy productive talk in order to promote critical thinking skills and develop the learner as an individual with particular opinions. (Red Star Secondary School parent 1)

Thus from the parent's point of view the teachers are encouraging freedom of expression and discussion, they are promoting critical thinking and as such attempting to promote democracy in the school.

At Excell Secondary School I also received positive responses from the teachers, learners and two parents. Teacher 2 posited:

So we do encourage them to be critical thinkers. The teaching is learner-centred. Like the learners they participate and they are comfortable, they are in a relaxed environment when they are being taught ... It's not like teachers standing there and talking, talking and talking. There's interaction between teacher and learners. There's that flow. You need to teach and stop, then get the learners input and see if they are really grasping the information. So you'll get that by having a learner-centred environment. And there's dialogue as well. (Excell Secondary School teacher 2)

According to the teacher, teaching is learner-centred and learners are allowed to air their views. Learner 1 who stated that, "we are able to talk freely in class like in terms of giving ideas and giving our point of view and the way we see things happening" further corroborated the preceding statement. During my stay at Excell Secondary School I witnessed learners preparing for a dance festival that seemed to be their initiative. However, parent 1 at Excell Secondary School felt that from his interaction with his children who were at the school, teaching and learning were both learner-centred and teacher-centred. He added that, "There appears to be an element of critical thinking and ... regurgitation".

The preceding response suggests that traditional teaching methods are to some extent practiced at Excell Secondary School. These traditional methods are characterized by

a one-way, teacher-centred, anti-dialogical approach to teaching and learning (Taylor & Robinson, 2009). However, from the parent's comments what is promising is that there is some learner-centredness and emphasis on critical thinking with regard to teaching and learning at Excell Secondary School.

Admittedly, at both of the case study schools there were mixed responses with regard to learner-centred teaching. At Red Star Secondary School the principal emphasized the need to complete the syllabus and assessments, and was of the opinion that these issues placed a strain on learner-centred teaching. The principal at Excell Secondary School reiterated similar feelings by explaining that the notion of learner-centredness was difficult to put into practice. However, from the responses it is evident that there is a move towards learner-centred teaching and learning at both of the schools. There was also an emphasis on promoting critical thinking at both schools.

### **6.5 Democratic schools and leadership**

For question nine I asked the principals: 'Explain your leadership role in a democratic school.' The teachers, parents and learners were asked to 'explain the principal's leadership role in a democratic school.' All the respondents unanimously agreed that in a democratic school leadership emanates from others and not only from those in formal leadership roles. This notion came across clearly in the comment from teacher 1 at Red Star Secondary who maintained: "I think these days principals realize that one person does not run the school". The words "these days" clearly refers to present-day practices.

Williams et al. (2009) refer to traditional school structures that are arranged into hierarchies with top-down leadership. These structures tend to isolate teachers and often result in teachers working in isolation. Barr (2007) takes this argument further by stating that traditional schools maintain hierarchical relationships between learners and teachers and even among teachers themselves. However, my observations revealed collegial staff relationships, and even the relationships between teacher and learners were characterized by care and respect. Moreover, O'Hair et al. (2000) maintain that in a traditional school the primary decision maker is the principal. However, referring to the teacher's response, she emphasizes that principals understand that solely one person cannot run a school. Similarly, Gronn (2003, p. 17)

elaborates that the notion of the “hero paradigm”, which is the individual-focused heroic approach to leadership, has been challenged shifting the focus onto what Oduro (2004) refers to as the post-heroic model that places emphasis on aspects like participation, collective leadership, teamwork and empowerment. Again, from my observation it was evident that the principals at Excell Secondary School and Red Star Secondary School advocated participation, collective leadership, teamwork and empowerment. Teacher 2 at Red Star Secondary School stated: “He is not a one-man leader who expects everyone to listen passively. Instead he shares leadership. He influences others to get involved in projects ”. The teacher stated emphatically that the principal believed in shared leadership. Teacher 1 elaborated:

Leadership would be [distributed]. It’s throughout the different levels – level 1, level 2, and level 3 but also you do not really feel that there’s somebody you are answerable to. You are a leader. He has confidence in you to run your subject, to do your work in the classroom, make decisions amongst yourselves in little committees. So you know you find that you don’t actually feel that you lacking. You are pretty much in control of what you are doing in the school. (Red Star Secondary School teacher 1)

From the preceding response it can be deduced that the teacher is referring to delegation as well as distributed leadership. The teachers are also able to take leading roles and make decisions in their committees. The respondent at Red Star Secondary School also pointed out that the principal had faith in the potential of his teachers.

Teacher 3 at the same school remarked:

I am involved in mathematical literacy in sharing knowledge about its curriculum; its assessment programme and I lead other teachers teaching mathematical literacy in the school... This delegation of responsibility has empowered me a lot in terms of leadership, organization and administration and even setting of papers. (Red Star Secondary School teacher 3)

This teacher views delegation as having a positive influence on him. He feels that delegation of responsibility has empowered him. In extending this line of thought Dimmock (1995) affirms that leadership in democratic schools is about power sharing and empowering others to lead. Allowing his teachers to take control and make decisions in their committees implies that this principal is empowering his teachers. Bush (2008) also refers to school-wide leadership, suggesting that leadership is spread

throughout the institution and thus that leadership is shared. Teacher 3 also claimed: “Each department is controlled by the HoD... That immediately shows that there’s shared leadership”. From the teachers’ responses it appears that the principal is spreading leadership throughout the school and perhaps views leadership as a collective responsibility.

Learner 2 at Excell Secondary School felt that the principal was democratic. She stated:

He is very much a democratic leader because he listens and considers the views of others. He involves others in decision-making. (Excell Secondary School learner 2)

According to the learner the principal is democratic because he considers the needs of all stakeholders and involves them in decision-making. However, Woods (2005) posits that democratic leadership involves being committed to fundamental ideas and values that form the bedrock of democracy. From the preceding discussions it is evident that both of the principals are committed to the democratic principles enshrined in the Constitution of the RSA.

Similar ideas of the principal being democratic were resonated by teacher 1 in Excell Secondary School:

Our principal is very democratic. He allows other members of staff and school community to be involved in the functioning of the school. He caters for involvement of other members. He can delegate very well ... I think by delegating he’s allowing people to come on board and give them an opportunity to grow. I mean he’s always there to encourage us to get involved. He’s always encouraging us to take up new projects and I think in this way he’s being very democratic and open. He’s not stifling the growth of level one teachers. He’s giving them a chance to progress. So through delegation he is empowering others, encouraging development. Most of us do not know our potential until we are given a task. A good thing about our principal is that he encourages professional growth through improving our professional qualifications. If there is trust and honesty then faith in the potential of others comes about naturally. (Excell Secondary School teacher 1)

According to this teacher the principal at Excell Secondary School is democratic and assists in the teachers’ professional development as well as focuses on developing his teachers’ potential through delegation. As mentioned, delegation can be viewed as a way of empowering others, and Gastil (1994) posits that democratic leadership

accentuates empowerment of individuals in the organization. Moreover, the teacher claims that leadership roles are created through various new projects. At both of the schools I witnessed first-hand how teachers initiated and coordinated school activities. For example, at Excell Secondary School the teacher responsible for supervising the student teachers held a meeting with the latter which I was privileged to observe. Issues discussed included planning, preparation, use of resources and involvement in extracurricular activities. In another incident a teacher was also preparing to take a few learners abroad for the next phase of a competition. At Red Star Secondary School I witnessed a teacher speaking to the matric learners about study techniques and another teacher was busy planning a fun run for the school. Even the secretary was involved in coordinating the repairs and maintenance of the school.

During staff meetings the principals allowed those individuals involved in coordinating events to address the staff on issues related to their events. In this way the principals draw not only on the skills and expertise of their staff but also create opportunities for shared leadership. Prinsloo (2003) maintains that a democratic leadership style offers opportunities for good human relations, and Woods (2005) elaborates that democratic leadership supports dispersal of leadership. Moreover, democratic leadership is rooted in the belief that all individuals “can contribute to, and enhance the work of, the school” (Reitzug & O’Hair, 2002, p. 122). At Excell Secondary School teacher 3 stated: “we have those different committees and those committees have got people in charge”. According to teacher 1 at Excell Secondary School, the principal allows others to get involved in the activities and functioning of the school:

For example we senior educators mentor new educators and student teachers. We conduct workshops on curriculum issues and school policy in general. Presently I am tasked with reading the new policy document on learner attendance and I will workshop the staff early next year. (Excell Secondary School teacher 1)

It is evident with regard to leadership the teachers are provided with opportunities such as conducting workshops and are therefore not stifled. Teacher 3 also mentioned committees which implies dispersal of leadership. Rusch (1995, as cited in Williams et al., 2009) states principals in democratic schools engage in capacity building, and November et al. (2010) elaborate that staff development is an essential element in the

democratization of school structures. The principal at Excell Secondary School asserted:

The other thing I said is have faith in people ... You draw on the expertise. You draw on their knowledge. Even if they haven't got expertise. They haven't got the knowledge – draw on their enthusiasm. The learning will take care of itself. You'll always learn. It's very easy to learn when you are enthusiastic. The worst is when you are unenthusiastic and you don't want to learn. That's a terrible combination... (Excell Secondary School principal)

From the preceding response it is evident that the principal believes in getting others on board with regard to the activities in school. It also suggests that the principal is not afraid of sharing power. The principals had faith in the potential of their staff and this is aptly captured in the statements made by the principal of Red Star Secondary School:

I can see myself becoming obsolete because of that, honestly. If I had to say now what role am I fulfilling, how am I adding value I will have to answer others can do all these things, others have new ideas and they can take the institution further. (Red Star Secondary School principal)

In other words, the principal has faith in others in his school and believes that they can take the school further because they have the 'know-how' and the potential. Teacher 3 at the same school corroborates this statement: "My principal has a lot of faith and confidence in others". Parent 3 also commented: "He believes that individuals need to grow and develop. This results in his faith in people's potential..." Hess and Johnson (2010) contend that faith in people to be active, participatory and responsible is fundamental to a social understanding of democracy. Kelly (1995) as well as Beane and Apple (1999) resonate the idea pertaining to the need for faith in individuals. Similarly, Dewey (1939) viewed democracy in association with faith in the potential of human nature. This principal was also not afraid to mention that his staff can take the school to greater heights. Even learner 1 at Red Star Secondary School, felt that other personnel in the school contributed significantly to the functioning of the school:

... although he [the principal] is the face of our school there are so many people behind him that help to make the school what it is today, not only in his leadership but also in his decision-making which is shared. (Red Star Secondary School learner 1)

The learner's response implies interdependence with regard to the relationship between the principal and staff and this also suggests that they are working together.

This interconnectedness contributes to the spirit of interdependence in the school. The idea of interdependence among all individuals and more specifically how an individual's behaviour has an influence on the organization as a whole finds resonance in a distributed perspective of leadership (Leithwood et al., 2006). In effect a distributed perspective of leadership not only allows others to lead but also allows individuals to work together (Harris, 2005a, 2005b). It seems as if this idea of working together is accentuated at Red Star Secondary School.

In describing his leadership style, the principal at Red Star Secondary School believes: "My leadership style place emphasis on serving learners, educators and parents, rather than assuming the position of an authority figure". It is evident that the principal does not see himself as a figure of authority wielding power, and from my observations and my interactions he is a calm, considerate, polite and focused individual. Parent 2 affirms the aforementioned statements:

With regard to the principal he is definitely different from the type of principals I encountered in the past. I remember in the past we used to be afraid to speak to the principal because he was so authoritarian. But with our principal he is a good listener and always willing to hear your point of view. He is calm, polite and caring... He encourages teamwork. (Red Star Secondary School parent 2)

The parent suggests that the principal is not a person you would feel afraid to go to instead he is approachable and always willing to listen. The principal added that, "The leadership style that one adopts in a democratic school should therefore allow for growth of strong teams comprising all the relevant stakeholders". Essentially his emphasis is on teamwork, so that all stakeholders are on board. Leadership was to a large extent characterized by collaboration and team efforts.

Furthermore, Stoll and Temperley (2008) assert that distributed leadership encourages teamwork and functions successfully in an environment where there is mutual support and trust. Thus the leadership structure at both of the schools is actually fairly flat, because as evident there are many individuals involved in decision-making. Instead of a hierarchical type of leadership that follows a top-down approach, a very horizontal type of leadership seemed to be developing. At Red Star Secondary School the idea of working as a team was expressed by parent 3:



He believes that everyone should work as a team – so he promotes team work and this is in contrast to the idea of a one man leader. He has committees and this suggests that he is willing to share leadership. He draws on the expertise of others. (Red Star Secondary School parent 3)

The parent appeared steadfast in her belief that the principal shares leadership. She also stated that the principal turns to those with expertise, thus implying that he is aware that he cannot run the school alone and requires the skills of others.

Parent 1 at Excell Secondary School added another dimension to leadership in the school, stating that, he (the principal) “fosters a spirit of Ubuntu as he believes in the interconnectedness of individuals and team effort”. Teacher 3 also referred to Ubuntu. Msila (2008, p. 65) refers to Ubuntu as an “African-centred form of leadership”. Ubuntu recognizes the individual in relation to others, and it is for this reason that Manala (2002) aptly states that interdependence features prominently in Ubuntu, thus emphasizing the interconnectedness among individuals. Interestingly, for Dewey (1916) democracy was viewed as a form of social organization in which individuals realized they were interconnected and learned by working with others. Learner 1 at Red Star Secondary School captured the idea of the interconnectedness of people that contributes to the spirit of interdependence in the school.

Finally, the respondents at both schools referred to the principals offering support to individuals, creating productive school cultures and developing structures that foster shared decision-making. The aforementioned characteristics, according to Leithwood (1994, as cited in Bush, 2007b) point towards transformational leadership, hence suggesting that both principals also displayed characteristics of transformational leadership.

From the responses at both of the schools it was evident that these principals were to a large extent democratic as well as supportive in their roles. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, at both schools the principals felt that leadership could emanate from others in the school community. Thus a distributed perspective of leadership is accentuated since it advances the idea of leadership being extended beyond the actions of the school principal (Spillane et al., 2007). At Excell Secondary School and Red Star Secondary School the principals promoted shared leadership and teamwork.

In fact the notion of a very horizontal type of leadership seemed to be emerging. Moreover, the traditional hierarchical organizational structures in these schools seem to be evolving and accommodating a distributive perspective of leadership, and this leadership perspective “accords well with the ideas of democratic practices” (DoE, 2008, p. 60).

## **6.6 Democratic school governance**

For question ten participants were asked: ‘What role does the principal play in shared school governance?’ Some of the participants who were not on the SGB felt that those who were on the SGB would provide greater detail. All of the respondents, even those who were not representatives on the SGB, firmly believed that governance was shared at their schools. This is a move from away from traditional school governance in South African schools. Squelch (1999, p. 128) asserts that traditionally in South Africa school governance has been “hierarchical and authoritarian in nature”. Thus at both the schools the notion of shared school governance appeared to be taking root.

From my observations at both the schools I noticed parent representatives in school during school hours discussing issues, and both principals appeared to be at ease and willing to talk to these parents. At Excell Secondary School parent representatives frequently called at the office. On one occasion the parent representatives decided to sell some of the old unused equipment and opted to get tenders. As I walked with the parents and the principal to view the equipment the principal remained very quiet, and I became concerned. Then he informed me that when it comes to these issues of finance the parent governors who are businessmen have the knowledge, so he leaves it up to them to attend to the matter. One of the parents was very involved in the vegetable garden at the school as he had knowledge about farming, and the fresh vegetables from the garden were sold to a nearby shopkeeper. Thus I could get a sense of ownership with regard to the parent representatives and the school.

At Red Star Secondary School teacher 1 stated:

School governance at our school is definitely shared. I think our principal is more like a facilitator between the community and school. The fact is that the community was always out there but principals were not answerable to the community. They just ran their schools. But now with the governing bodies on board you have the issue of accountability

to the parents. You got the parents there and you need to liaise with them and communicate with them and make sure that the governance of the school is shared with them. All stakeholders are encouraged to share ideas and views. This is what our principal strives to do. (Red Star Secondary School teacher 1)

According to the teacher, she sees the role of the principal as a facilitator who guides the decision-making process. This is indeed crucial, especially if there is a shift from the traditional autocratic leadership to a participatory one. Thus to ensure involvement of all stakeholders the principal has opted for a more consultative role.

Parent 2 at Excell Secondary School commented:

I would think that Mr X promotes shared school governance. He values this partnership with the parents and he always says, “together we can achieve more.” Who can dispute that when the matric results have been on a constant rise and there are always new projects coming up. Like now there’s the new science laboratory underway, fencing and extra tuition for learners. He views the SGB representatives as equal partners and I am convinced that they are not there to rubber stamp decisions taken by him. He does guide them on issues but ultimately it is shared decision making. The parents are not afraid to put forth their views. (Excell Secondary School parent 2)

Parent 2 is of the opinion that the principal encourages shared school governance and through working together the school was able to embark on major projects. The parent emphasizes that the principal’s role is that of a ‘guide’ and the parents are not there to merely approve decisions. However, parent 1 at Excell Secondary School believed that although the principal encourages shared school governance and facilitates the SGB meetings, there are times when he (the principal) dominates the meetings. In spite of this, he added that, “The parent component feels free to voice their opinions”. My observation of SGB meetings revealed the chairperson who was a parent had complete control of the meeting.

In contrast to the aforementioned, Van Wyk (2004) found that the principal was still essentially in charge of school governance. According to Keefe (2004), principals who employ traditional school governance ultimately assume power and control with regard to the running of the school. However, this was not evident in the sample schools. At Excell Secondary School the principal amplified the idea of the principal being a facilitator at the SGB meetings:

... you have a chairperson of a governing body, the chairperson leads the governing body. The people play the roles and you support those people. You encourage and develop and you tutor, mentor people who are playing these roles. (Excell Secondary School principal)

The principal is of the opinion that he needs to support, educate and guide these individuals. In essence, the principal believes that the parent representatives have a role and the SASA clearly outlines this role. It is evident that these principals have insight into the SASA and the notion of partnership is accentuated. The principal at Red Star Secondary School also elaborated as follows: “we respect each other’s role function”. Respecting each other’s role contributes positively to the working relationship. Teacher 1 at Red Star Secondary School went on to add:

The very fact that our principal doesn’t chair the meeting and he doesn’t dominate the meetings means he’s definitely sharing school governance and he is part of the whole process of the community and the school being in partnership ... Parents are actively involved in the meeting and make decisions together with the principal. They are not coerced by the principal into making a decision. Even us being staff reps. We also have our full say at the meeting. Even when we come back to school. (Red Star Secondary School teacher 1)

The teacher points out that the principal does not dictate the decision-making but rather negotiates it. This statement contradicts the parent’s claim that the principal tends to dominate the SGB meetings. Furthermore, according to the teacher the principal’s involvement and contribution in the SGB is not such that he overshadows the role of other stakeholders. From my observations at both the schools I can confirm that the principal does not chair the meetings. However, at Excell Secondary School I noticed that the parents often sought the principal’s input, and it appeared as if the parents wanted guidance from the principal. Having mentioned that, I must point out that it seemed as if the principals embraced the idea of democratic school governance. In addition, democratic school governance focuses on stakeholder voice.

With regard to learner participation in the SGB meetings at Red Star Secondary School, both the learner governors were present. These learners presented a report on the events they will be hosting for the year. However, there was one learner representative present at two SGB meetings at Excell Secondary School. At both schools I felt that there was not enough effort, if any, on the part of the parent or teacher representatives to include the learners in the discussion. It was only the principal at Excell Secondary School who asked the learner for her input just once

during the first meeting. At the second meeting the learner representative presented an issue about the school toilets. Discussions at SGB meetings gave an impression that the learner representatives were not consulted frequently. However, parent 1 at Excell Secondary School felt differently and commented, “I have heard the learner voice at SGB level, I am confident that the voice is not purely tokenism”.

The finding of this study is similar to that of Mabovula’s (2009) study, where learner participation in school governance in five secondary schools in the Eastern Cape was investigated. It was found that although the democratization of school governance has given all stakeholders a powerful voice in school issues through the RCLs, “learners voices are, seemingly, being silenced” (Mabovula, 2009, p. 219). Rubin and Silva (2003, as cited in Lin, 2008) advise that inclusion of learner voice in school governance requires offering learners realistic space and time to be included in the process of decision-making. However, I felt that perhaps this was not given much attention at the SGB meetings that I observed at both schools.

Teacher 1 at Excell Secondary School corroborated my comment about minimal learner participation at the SGB meetings:

... learners do not make input on all policy issues. When it came to uniform, when it came to matters that deal with the learners we had to get input from them as well so it was taken into account. When it comes to the school code of conduct for learners I must say that this is not always done ... in consultation with both parents and learners. Perhaps we need to focus on all stakeholders getting involved in formulating this document. (Excell Secondary School teacher 1)

In addition, learner 2 at the same school stated: “Some of the time the learner voice is heard, but perhaps it should be heard all the time”. Parent 2 added that with regard to learner involvement in policy making, “I think that this is an area that needs developing”. Again the issue of minimal learner participation is accentuated. Even at Red Star Secondary School teacher 1 claimed:

... in terms of the learner voice I would say that it is not well incorporated ... I must emphasize that the learners are represented on the SGB and issues are often discussed with them. Maybe we should be including them more. I don’t think we actually consult them on many issues. We tend more to tell them what’s going on. Major issues are sorted out by us the teachers, principal, management and parents. (Red Star Secondary School teacher 1)

Teacher 3 also provided a similar response: “Contradictory to the whole idea of democracy I don’t think they [learners] were consulted on all policy making”. Most of the respondents at both the schools stated that although the learners are consulted, this is not done for all issues. They agreed that there was a need to incorporate the learner voice on all issues. Teacher 1 at Red Star Secondary School felt that they are inclined to merely relate to the learners what is going on.

In response to the question of learner participation at SGB meetings, the principal at Excell Secondary School felt that:

We as a school can do a little bit more in terms of training of those learners. Although we’ve done boot camps, leadership courses, etc. there’s still room to get to that level or stage. A lot of it is about exposure. I mean it’s always about improving things. (Excell Secondary School principal)

The principal felt that the learners needed to be trained, hence equipping them with skills so that they can contribute effectively to decision-making at the SGB meetings. Perhaps giving them time and space to articulate their inputs will be a better way to address the issue. However, training in deliberation skills and leadership skills will be beneficial. Singh (2006) in his study also found that although the principals recognized the need for the inclusion of learners in shared school governance, it was not easy to include the learners in meaningful ways. The minutes of SGB meetings revealed inputs from learners on issues like change in the school uniform which was implemented at Excell Secondary School, the need for cutting of the grass after school, and conduct of learners after school. These refer to minor issues.

However, learners are also important stakeholders in the SGB, and it is therefore important for learners to make their input on school policy issues as well. Learner 1 at Red Star Secondary School explained:

... the school code of conduct and the school rules are also guided by the Constitution of our country. But from my knowledge I don’t think the learners really have a say in the code of conduct or school rules. (Red Star Secondary School learner 1)

The learner acknowledges that the school code of conduct and the school rules are shaped by the Constitution. Nevertheless, the learner feels that they do not really have a say in the formulation of these policies. Even at Excell Secondary School the

learner representative stated: “Like school rules, we don’t have a choice ... We give input only on class rules”. Similarly, Mabovula (2008; 2009) in her studies found that learners are still being silenced. Mncube and Harber (2009) also concluded that learners in South African schools seem to be excluded from policy formulation, and specific reference was made to exclusion with regard to the formulation of the school code of conduct. Mncube and Harber (2009, p. 33) deduced that learners in most schools in South Africa “are solely used for decoration and as tokenism”. The notion of tokenism and learner participation was discussed in detail at the beginning of the chapter.

I must point out that although there was minimal participation of learners, as referred to above, there was a culture of participation, consultation and collaboration with regard to the teacher representatives, parent representatives and the principal. At Excell Secondary School the SGB members sat around a table in the staff room and the atmosphere was generally relaxed. Even at Red Star Secondary School the SGB members met in a computer room, and the chairs were arranged in a circle to facilitate discussion in the group. The non-teaching staff member recorded the minutes of the meeting. It was clearly evident that these principals did not make decisions independently. Instead consultation and collaboration featured prominently. The parents were not afraid to clarify issues and offer input. At both schools the parent representatives were employed and able to communicate proficiently in English. They were familiar with meeting procedures and were able to articulate their views clearly. These factors could have contributed to the open communication between the parents, teachers and principal during the meetings.

Mncube (2007a, p. 106) affirms that democratically governed schools “honour participation, adequate representation, tolerance, deliberation and dialogue and rational discussion which lead to collective decision-making”. However, I found during observation of the SGB meetings at Excell Secondary School that although the parents were involved in discussion, they were not fully *au fait* with the actual practices – specifically past practices of the school. They therefore required guidance from the principal and rightfully so, as their children may not have been in the school years ago. Similarly, Van Wyk (2007) also concluded that the parent representatives are dependent on the teachers and principal for leadership and guidance in decision-

making. Perhaps there are occasions when parent representatives would seek assistance from the principals, especially with regard to past practices.

Teacher 1 at Excell Secondary School was also concerned about parents being clued-up about the process through which their voices can be heard:

Parents need to realize that the governing body is the means to get their voice heard. It is a vehicle through which they are able to make inputs with regard to issues concerning school governance. Parents need to be educated that they have a body with their representatives and their voices can be heard through these representatives. (Excell Secondary School teacher 1)

The response from the teacher suggests that parents must be informed that their voices can be heard through the SGB, and I am of the opinion that schools need to educate the community in which they are located on such aspects.

Apart from Excell Secondary School parent 1 who claimed that the principal sometimes dominated the SGB meetings, at both of the schools the respondents believed the emphasis to be on shared school governance. Nevertheless, there was a feeling at the schools that more can be done with regard to inclusion of learners in all decision-making.

## **6.7 Democratic schools and challenges**

For the final question (question eleven), I asked the principal: ‘In your opinion what are some of the challenges experienced in moving your school to become more democratic?’ The rest of the respondents were asked: ‘In your opinion what are some of the challenges experienced by the principal in moving your school to become more democratic?’ At both the schools all the respondents referred to various challenges experienced by the school principal in moving the school to become more democratic.

Teacher 1 at Red Star Secondary School stated:

I think one of the major challenges of becoming democratic is sometimes that people can overplay the democracy card. You want to be part of every single decision. It will be time-consuming and it is not possible to consult all the stakeholders all the time, especially for urgent issues requiring immediate attention ... It's not autocratic if certain decisions are made by the principal although it may seem as if they are. But you've got to realize there are some decisions that leaders will need



to make and for the smooth running of the school and ultimately that is what we need ... Sometimes when you get caught up in democratic processes you want to deliberate, you want to consult. Then the time is going and sometimes you lose focus of the issue on hand and it could lead to other issues that had no relevance to what you were discussing ... (Red Star Secondary School teacher 1)

The teacher argued that it is time-consuming to deliberate on every issue and there may be times when this may not be possible as a decision may be required immediately. Collective decision-making often involves extended discussions and deliberations, and this may be time-consuming. For this reason the principal may make decisions unilaterally, and the teacher did not seem to mind if this was to happen. However, teacher 3 at the same school felt differently about time spent on deliberations. He claimed that, “The time for us to engage in democratic processes is really not a big problem”. In other words, he felt that time spent on deliberations was not an issue. At Excell Secondary School parent 2 mentioned the issue of time and teacher 1 posited: “collaboration and consultation are processes that take a lot of time”. Teacher 1 at Red Star Secondary School also emphasized that during the process of deliberation it may be easy to get caught up in the process and thereby lose focus of the issue at hand. Extending this argument is Klinker (2006), who comments that cultivating deep democratic ideals takes time, and Woods and Gronn (2009) elaborate that long, drawn out deliberations could result in decisions being significantly delayed.

At Excell Secondary School parent 2 spoke about the timetable. She explained:

There is a timetable that the teacher has to work by. The teachers are forced to complete the teaching of certain content at specific times. This can create problems. (Excell Secondary School parent 2)

The teacher suggested that the rigid nature of the timetable could hinder democratic practices. Learner 3 at Red Star Secondary School shared a similar view. He maintained:

The curriculum together with the assessments are emphasized. Sometimes the completion of the curriculum and assessments are done at the expense of aspects like discussion and learner participation. Even the fact that there is a timetable that dictates what should be done could influence the promotion of democracy. (Red Star Secondary School learner 3)

Again the prescriptive nature of the curriculum as well as an assessment driven curriculum was emphasized. The learner felt that the need to complete a set curriculum is given priority before the practice of democratic principles.

Responding to the question on challenges experienced by the principal in moving the school to become more democratic, teacher 1 at Red Star Secondary School felt that:

There is also the issue of the SGB, many are well equipped to be on such bodies, but some lack expertise and decision-making skills which hinders decision-making. (Red Star Secondary School teacher 1)

The teacher was of the opinion that some SGB members did not possess the necessary skills. Focusing on the same aspect parent 2 at the school elaborated:

Some individuals on SGBs may lack the skills required to participate in shared school governance and this could become an issue. But I suppose with training this could be addressed. (Red Star Secondary School parent 2)

On the same issue Excell Secondary School parent 2 purported:

This brings us to another point – whether the parent and learner reps are able to cope with the responsibility of being on the SGB, of having to contribute meaningfully to decision-making. What I am questioning is whether they have the skills to do this task? If they don't then would this not be a challenge to creating a democratic school? (Excell Secondary School parent 2)

Thus the issue of training of the SGB members comes to the fore. Frustration and annoyance about the issue emerged from Red Star Secondary School teacher 1. Her response was: “We should have had training but we don't have the funding, time or whatever. But it would be good if we could have training”. Teacher 3 at Red Star Secondary School aptly stated that, “the amount of expertise and the knowledge of each role player does have an influence on the extent to which contributions are made”. The teacher alluded to the point that shared school governance would be influenced by the knowledge and the expertise of stakeholders. On the same issue teacher 1 at Excell Secondary School explained:

This [training] is sadly lacking and therefore requires immediate attention. Every member on the SGB requires training. The Department needs to be informed that they need to come on board and spearhead this training process. (Excell Secondary School teacher 1)

Thus the teacher feels that the DoE should initiate the training and this issue demands immediate attention. Frank and Huddleston (2009) take this line of reasoning further, by stating that democratic schools require new skills of teachers and training which is fundamental and is lacking in many countries. Mncube (2009a) adds that parent governors lack the necessary skills required to execute duties that they are assigned. Similarly, Bush and Heystek (2003) as well as Tsoetsi et al. (2008) recommended training or capacity building for the stakeholder representatives on the SGB.

Learner 3 at Excell Secondary School argued:

Democratic schools emphasize shared school governance and with power being shared with other stakeholders namely the teachers, parents and learners it is possible that principals may fear losing power. I'm not sure but this could be possible. I wouldn't think that this is happening in our school but perhaps at other schools. (Excell Secondary School learner 3)

The learner was of the opinion that shared school governance could result in the principals' fears of losing power. However, teacher 1 at Red Star Secondary School responded:

... as long as a principal has adopted that democratic stance and knows that everything should be transparent and there must always be channels of communication, always be dialogue between all parties concerned - that is the learners, the educators, the cleaners, whoever is part of the school ethos, then there is no need to be afraid or threatened. (Red Star Secondary School teacher 1)

From the preceding response it can be deduced that provided the principal adopts a predominantly democratic leadership style and his conduct and way of doing things are beyond reproach, he does not have to feel threatened.

Learner 2 at Excell Secondary School claimed: "Some adults may fear that learners may be given too much power". Again the idea of losing control is emphasized. The learner added: "Some adults may fear that learners are not qualified or mature to make decisions on all issues concerning the running of the school". Teacher 3 at Red Star Secondary School highlighted the idea of learners being unable to contribute on all issues concerning the running of school:

You obviously not going to ask learner representatives to contribute in areas which they are not familiar with. Like obviously short listing of candidates for a teaching post. (Red Star Secondary School teacher 3)

In other words the learners are perceived as immature to contribute on major issues concerning the school.

At the schools many of the respondents spoke about the mindsets of a few of the staff members and teacher 1 at Excell Secondary School stated:

... in many schools teachers and principals may still be stuck in past practices that revolve around authoritarianism. Thus we may need to change these individuals' mindsets so that they can embrace democracy and live democracy in their schools. It is the general thinking that is the main criteria for transformation. (Excell Secondary School teacher 1)

The respondent believed that in many schools some teachers and principals have not moved beyond authoritarian practices. Similarly, parent 2 posited:

The other problem has to do with some of the older teachers and their outlook to life. Some of them are prone to the old way of teaching where the teacher knows all and the teacher is the leader and the learners must listen. Again this will be with a few of the teachers. You don't expect them to change their ways in a few years. (Excell Secondary School parent 2)

The parent claims that a few of the old teachers are still caught up in their old ways but the parent also cautions that the process of transformation takes time. With regard to the teachers, Morrison (2008) points out that very few teachers have experienced democratic education themselves. Extending this argument are Harber and Serf (2006), who note that for schools to operate democratically teachers need to learn ways of working democratically in both the whole school and the classroom. Still on the issue of teachers and democracy, Mncube and Harber (2010, p. 623) refer to "the shortage of teachers trained in democratic ways of operating in the school and classroom". Ultimately teachers need to be trained to teach in democratic schools.

The principal at Excell Secondary School tried to shed light on the situation:

You see apartheid has done a terrible thing. It has institutionalized racism in us and you can't say with a wand in a hand that in 1994 ... all my ideology and political indoctrination has flown out of the window because we've been socialized ... You were schooled in that [apartheid ideologies]. It's a reality. I'm not saying it with any malice – it's a reality. (Excell Secondary School principal)

At Red Star Secondary School the principal extended the aforementioned argument:

... that is a challenge because you can't automatically expect people to say let's be democratic and I don't blame the people who say we can't be democratic - you know the way we see it because they've come from a certain tradition, especially the ones who are more senior where principals have behaved in a certain way ... Among some managers there are firmly entrenched beliefs in autocratic management styles and this will remain a major challenge for some time. (Red Star Secondary School principal)

From the aforementioned responses it is evident that respondents at the schools felt that individuals were still influenced by the dominant ideologies that they were indoctrinated with in the apartheid era. The principals acknowledged that it is challenging to free oneself from the biased imposition of beliefs. The principal at Red Star Secondary School also highlighted that some of the very senior teachers worked under principals who were not democratic. He even went as far as to state: "I will have to accept responsibility for the fact that some managers are not democratic at all times". Although the principal is prepared to accept responsibility for this, it must be pointed out that a paradigm shift is necessary with regard to these teachers. Parent 1 at Red Star Secondary School also felt that, "Their mindsets must be altered for them to embrace the spirit of democracy".

Linked closely to indoctrination of ideologies is the notion of power relations. The principal at Excell Secondary School elaborated:

I had to change the power relations between the learner and principal. I had to change the power relations between the principal and the site steward ... Why is there a gap between – in terms of where we are positioned? The other is this kind of territory - the control teachers don't want to lose. Right ... I think we dealing with issues of territories here. Teachers are largely territorial. You know in my class it has been like this for last the 30 years and it must continue ... Because that is the power relationship between them and the learner. (Excell Secondary School principal)

According to the principal power relations between learners and some teachers still exist. He believed that these teachers see the school as their territory and they don't want to lose control of the illusion of power. Again this mindset can be traced back to the education system during the apartheid years that emphasized the relationship of authority between the teacher and learner. At Red Star Secondary School parent 2 provided a similar point:

The teacher –learner relationship is another challenge. You would get some teachers – well very few- who may not want to accept the fact that in a democratic school learners and teachers see themselves as learning from each other. Some teachers may not want to value the contributions of learners in the actual teaching and learning that occurs in the classroom. This could influence democratic school practices. (Red Star Secondary School parent 2)

The parent suggests that some teachers have not embraced the notion of democracy in the actual teaching and learning process. The implication is that these few teachers do not see themselves as equals in the teaching and learning process. This suggests that they have not moved beyond the idea of the teacher as the font of all knowledge. Print et al. (2002, p. 201) purport that creating a democratic school culture implies that the relationship between learners and teachers should be “on a more equitable basis”. This implies that the idea of power relations needs to be done away with and the emphasis should be on sharing power instead of exerting power. Davies (1999) as well as Bäckman and Trafford (2007) comment that teachers fear that in giving learners a voice it could impact on discipline. Bäckman and Trafford (2007) substantiate this argument and assert that there is a general misconception that school democracy is discordant with good discipline.

The principal at Excell Secondary School stated that, “it [democracy] can only be a way of life if it is your way of thinking because you only act out what you think”. This implies that individuals will act out their interpretations of democracy. By extension, a democratic way of life will only be realized if it is thought of as such. The idea of influencing individuals to change their mindsets is reiterated. Even though there are various conceptions of democracy, the principal argued that an individual would have to internalize the notion of democracy before it is practised. Ryan and Rottmann (2009, p. 474) affirm that translating these democratic ideas into action is not a simple task and can be challenging, as our schools are centred on “deeply entrenched hierarchical relationships that work against such practices”. Thus attempts to introduce democratic practices represent a giant leap of faith into the unknown (Morrison, 2008).

At Red Star Secondary School parent 2 offered another aspect to consider. She explained:

I am also concerned about the representatives. They have to realize that they are there not for their own interest but rather they are there to act on behalf of a larger body. So there shouldn't be a situation where shared school governance is limited to those on the SGB. Parent representatives should meet regularly with the rest of the parents and get their input and even provide some kind of feedback after SGB meetings. This I find is lacking. (Red Star Secondary School parent 2)

The parent alludes to the point that shared school governance could be limited to just a few individuals on the SGB. Teacher 3 at the same school also affirmed that parents as stakeholders do not meet as a group to discuss issues. Furthermore, respondents at both the schools informed me that before SGB meetings teacher representatives generally meet with the staff to discuss issues. After SGB meetings the teacher representatives provide feedback to the staff. The same occurs with the learner representatives. However, at the sample schools parent representatives did not meet with the larger body of parents. Teacher 3 at Red Star Secondary School stated that he was not aware of any meeting called up by parent representatives for parents. In short, parents do not meet as a group to discuss issues and this implies that shared school governance is ultimately in the hands of the representatives.

Learner 2 at Red Star Secondary School expressed his disappointment with the RCL and learner representatives. He stated: "I don't believe that it [the RCL] serves its purposes as they don't really take our concerns to the meetings". In short, the learner had no faith in the learner representatives. Learner 2 at Excell Secondary School also pointed out:

... only if learners speak about issues and talk about issues worrying them can anything be done about that issue. So I am saying that learners have to learn to speak about all issues and not only on certain issues like uniform and the buildings. A school has to do with a lot of issues. Yes that's it. (Excell Secondary School learner 2)

The respondent suggests that learners require skills in deliberation to engage in discussion of both minor and major issues.

At Red Star Secondary School parent 3 mentioned:

You have the Department of Education. They issue instructions to the principals and the principals have to follow these instructions. I've not heard cases where the principals can negotiate with the Department. The Department creates this idea of a hierarchy where they are at the

top and principals have to follow instructions. So I think that this set up does not really promote democracy. Then you have the Department policing schools with regard to the matric results and most recently the annual national assessments. They – the Department are just interested in the results of the assessments- Learner achievement is the focus and sadly this is what schools are pressurized into believing. So promoting democracy may soon not be a priority. I am aware that Department officials also visit schools especially underperforming ones so there is some degree of authoritarianism. (Red Star Secondary School parent 3)

The parent believes that the hierarchy that is in place in the education system goes against the idea of democracy. She also associates the close monitoring of underperforming schools with authoritarianism. The parent also suggests that education is results driven and this high stakes pressure of results can work against the idea of democracy.

Similarly, parent 2 at Excell Secondary School maintained:

Also the structure within the system, the education system creates this idea of rigid control. The principals are forced to listen to the department officials who are their superiors. At meetings we as parents are always informed that certain things are directives from the department- it just has to be done. We are told this is what the department wants. So is there any consultation and communication at higher levels- with the principals and department officials? (Excell Secondary School parent 2)

The parent comments on the rigid structure within the education system and questions if department officials consult with principals. The respondent suggests that this hierarchy that exists in the education system is not conducive to the facilitation of democratic practices.

Finally, most of the respondents referred to parent apathy. The principal at Red Star Secondary School claimed: “the idea that parents should take ownership of the school is not as widespread as it should be”. Teacher 1 at Excell Secondary School stated:

From my experience in this school here I feel the parent involvement is a major problem. I find this link between the school and home has been broken. When we talk in terms of parent involvement we expect more. (Excell Secondary School teacher 1)

In essence, many of the respondents felt that not all the parents, who are major stakeholders in the school, are contributing to the functioning of the school and the teachers expect more from the parents in terms of their involvement. Parent 2 and 3 at



Excell Secondary School as well as Parent 2 and 3 at Red Star Secondary School admitted that they were not very involved in the school activities.

At Red Star Secondary School parent 3 provided the following response concerning the lack of parent involvement:

In my case I don't attend meetings because it's time – and transport issues. For other parents they are probably occupied with work issues. For IsiZulu speaking parents perhaps its communication issues. Some IsiZulu speaking parents feel they don't have an important role to play in the school as a result they don't attend meetings at the school. Democracy requires the participation of people. So if parents are not involved in the school this is going to impact on democratic practices within the school. (Red Star Secondary School parent 3)

The parent who was also IsiZulu speaking claimed that black parents do experience a problem with communication. In addition these parents felt that they could not contribute significantly to the running of the school.

In summary, at the sample schools there was a feeling that the process of collaboration and consultation is time-consuming and there is a need for training of the SGB members as representatives may lack necessary skills and expertise. The principals concurred that certain individuals may still be stuck in past practices and ideologies that may work against democracy. This was related to the issue of power relations. Parent apathy as well as a hierarchical and results driven education system were referred to. Before I conclude this chapter I reflect on an issue that emanated from the data which I refer to as 'unfulfilled promises'.

### **6.8 Unfulfilled promises**

Although all the respondents seem to embrace the idea of democracy, the principal of Excell Secondary School, who was part of the long struggle for democracy, appeared to be frustrated as well as disappointed and bemoaned the slow delivery currently associated with the very promise of democracy. These feelings were revealed in his comments:

What's the sense of having democracy in a country when there's whole-scale starvation, where children are dying, where there's no access to health, where the infant mortality rate is growing, the literacy levels of learners are decreasing, where citizens' life chances and opportunities are very limited. We don't eat democracy. We eat bread

and butter and that is what must be considered. We get totally distracted about the whole thing. My school is very democratic but I might not be emphasizing quality public education. I'd rather it be less democratic and have good public education. (Excell Secondary School principal)

It is evident that the principal of Excell Secondary School acknowledges that the school is very democratic, but he also questions democracy in schools in relation to quality education. Interestingly, the document review at both schools revealed that these public schools achieved very good matric results in 2010 and 2011. At Excell Secondary School the principal in his February 2011 report referred to the 78% matric (Grade 12) pass rate for 2010. Red Star Secondary School boasted a 97% matric pass rate. In 2011, both the schools had over 90% matric pass rate. However, it must be pointed out that the increase in the matric pass rate or the high learner achievement cannot be attributed solely to democratic schooling.

Mncube and Harber (2010) explored democratic schooling in relation to quality education for learners in three provinces in South Africa. They (Mncube & Harber, 2010, p. 622) explain that in democratic schools, "Learners have come to be seen as active, with a natural desire to learn, making them capable of effective learning and responsible for their own learning". Their findings revealed a link between democracy in schools and the provision of quality education. Genç (2008) adds that democratic practices contribute to the progress of the school. Correspondingly, Davies et al. (2006, p. 2) found that learners in "more democratic schools were happier and felt more in control of their learning". There was a boost in learner self-esteem and confidence as a result of learners "taking responsibility and having a sense of ownership of various aspects of school life" (Davies et al., 2006, p. 2). Holmes (2006) also found that motivation and learning behaviour improve directly with an increase in learner participation. Mncube et al. (2011, p. 56) explain that, "listening to parents, encouraging their participation and giving them more power and responsibility (i.e. greater democratisation) can enhance school effectiveness and facilitate school improvement". The aforementioned all point towards some form of improvement in schools.

Although the principal raised concern about quality education his commitment to democracy is revealed in the fact that although he is disillusioned with the present political scenario, he is trying to run a democratic school. The principal added that:

I'm not saying that there's anything wrong with democracy but I am saying that let not the emphasis be like that, as if it is a solution to our ills. It's not. It's important to have a democratic school. I'm not saying it isn't. But I'm saying democracy must be an agent for making things better. When it doesn't serve that purpose then two things are happening. One we are either not practising it well or two we are not engaging with it as it should be ... (Excell Secondary School principal)

The principal's response at Excell Secondary School clearly articulates his expectation of a better life for the citizens of our country. This is stated in the preamble of the Constitution of the RSA that emphasizes a new set of values and a move away from the past so as to "heal the divisions of the past ... improve the quality of life of all citizens" (RSA, 1996a, p. 1). He questions if individuals are not putting democracy into practice or action. Of the principals at both schools it was only the principal from Excell Secondary School who clearly articulated his disillusionment with the current political scenario. It is not the notion of democracy that he questioned, but rather the practice and application of it, which I felt was rather thought provoking. The response implies that the principal associates democracy with improving the lives of citizens. This principal's initial response ("We don't eat democracy. We eat bread and butter...") suggests that as opposed to democracy, the basic needs in life are more important to those who are poverty-stricken.

In addressing the principal's aforementioned comments I refer to Sen (1999, p. 13), who asserts that individuals experiencing economic crisis "also need a political voice". Furthermore, Sen (1999, p. 13) aptly contends that, "Democracy is not a luxury that can await the arrival of general prosperity". In other words, democracy should not be viewed as unessential and as merely an extravagance that can be realized only when there's opulence. Instead it is a prerequisite for informed decision-making, good governance and promoting human rights. It is also important to note that South Africa is still a young democracy carrying a heavy burden inherited from the apartheid era. Therefore time is required for South Africa to strengthen and as such develop into a strong, mature democracy. Further, Patrick (2003) asserts that a move from one political system to another as well the consolidation of a new political

system is complex and requires time, but without democracy it is unlikely that the views of the people will be considered.

## **6.9 Conclusion**

In creating democratic schools at both of the case study sites, shared decision-making with an emphasis on shared purpose and trust was promoted. Both of the principals practiced an open-door policy and the principal at Excell Secondary School claimed that adherence to democratic principles is necessary. Red Star Secondary School principal felt that creating a democratic school involved working within the framework of the Bill of Rights.

Teacher 1 at Excell Secondary School felt that the principal “creates a positive atmosphere ... conducive to practice democracy”. He also spoke about a collaborative culture, teamwork and deliberation. Red Star Secondary School parent 1 explained that the principal instills a sense of togetherness, while respondents at Excell Secondary School used the analogy of the school as a family unit. At the two schools democratic cultures appear to be emerging. Smit and Oosthuizen (2011) posit that a democratic culture will only develop through democratic practices, and these principals promoted collegiality, communication, participation, human rights, collaboration, support and trust.

At both the schools the principals viewed leadership as being an extension beyond the actions of those in management positions, and they therefore promoted shared leadership practices. In fact the notion of a very horizontal type of leadership seemed to be emerging. Moreover, the traditional hierarchical organizational structures in these schools seem to be evolving and accommodating a distributed perspective of leadership. According to the DoE (2008, p. 60), the distributed leadership perspective “accords well with the ideas of democratic practices”.

With regard to school governance, apart from parent 1 at Excell Secondary School who claimed that the principal sometimes dominated the SGB meetings, respondents at the two schools believed the emphasis was on shared school governance. Nevertheless, there was a feeling at the schools that more can be done with regard to

inclusion of learners in all decision-making. From my observations at both schools I am convinced that the learner voice on all school issues requires greater attention.

There was a common perception that not much could be done with the curriculum, since it is a set one. Although the principal at Excell Secondary School felt that democratic principles could be integrated into the curriculum, the principal at Red Star Secondary School felt that it is difficult to integrate democratic principles into the curriculum because of the need to complete the syllabus and assessments. Respondents at Excell Secondary School believed that the school encourages debate, dialogue, discussion, freedom of expression and critical thinking. Essentially these criteria that are being emphasized are democratic principles. Although learner 1 at Red Star Secondary School referred to set assessments, she indicated that learners provide input with regard to the dates for assessments. Another learner mentioned that during lessons there was interaction and discussion. From the responses at the schools it was evident that there is a shift towards critical thinking and participative classrooms, and these are in line with OBE. At this point, I reiterate that OBE was aimed to democratize education.

Finally, the respondents referred to challenges in moving a school to become more democratic. There was a shared feeling that the process of collaboration and consultation is time-consuming and there is a need for training of the SGB members. The principals concurred that some individuals may still be stuck in past practices and ideologies. This may hinder the growth of democracy in the school. Excell Secondary School principal referred to issues of power relations that hinder democratic practices. In addition, respondents at both the schools referred to parent apathy and a hierarchical and results driven education system. Despite these challenges democracy seems to be taking root and developing at the case study schools.

Having concluded this chapter, I shift my attention to Chapter Seven, which focuses on the themes that emanated from the findings

## **CHAPTER SEVEN: THEMES EMERGING FROM THE FINDINGS**

### **7.1 Introductory remarks**

This chapter discusses some key themes that emerged from the findings of the present research. It does not attempt to exhaust all the themes that arose, but focuses on the major ones that I believe are crucial for the purpose of answering the research questions posed by this study. It also integrates some existing literature to discuss the connections between that literature and the present research. The themes discussed below are interrelated and include:

- ❖ The Constitution, democratic principles and democratic schools;
- ❖ Democratic structures and processes;
- ❖ Governance in democratic schools;
- ❖ Curriculum and teaching methods consistent with democracy;
- ❖ Democratic school culture;
- ❖ Leadership in democratic schools;
- ❖ Fundamental factors that support the further democratization of schools; and
- ❖ Factors that constrain the further democratization of schools.

A discussion of each theme follows.

### **7.2 The Constitution, democratic principles and democratic schools**

The interview responses revealed references to the Constitution of the RSA. In other words, respondents focused on the Constitution of the RSA and its links to democratic schools. At both schools common interpretations were resonated by the participants with regard to democratic schools fostering the practice of democratic principles. As a result my discussion will include democratic principles.

#### **7.2.1 The Constitution and democratic schools**

As stated, the principals at both schools associated the Constitution of the RSA with democratic schools. In short, they felt that democratic schools had constitutional links, thus accentuating the idea that the Constitution guides and supports the democratization of education and as such contributes to a democratic way of life in school. This linkage also hints at the notion of schools as democracies (O’Hair et al., 2000). With regard to schools as democracies, the focus is on creating schools that are

organized, governed and practiced as democracies. Drawing from my observations, interviews and document review it appears as though the principals at both schools were attempting to move their schools towards becoming democracies. These principals viewed the schools as institutions in which democracy can take root and flourish, and therefore the Constitution was of significance. Expanding on the preceding argument, I opine that the Constitution is a document that is common to all and forms the basis of South Africa's democracy, serving as a guide to a democratic way of life. It is also the document that propels the transformation process and is the key to sustaining a democratic society. Finally, as the supreme law in RSA wherein the core democratic principles are enshrined, it is perhaps for this very reason as well as the aforementioned that the principals referred to the Constitution of the RSA.

It follows that the Constitution of RSA aims at ensuring democracy and as such advocates democratic principles. For example, the Constitution of the RSA (RSA, 1996a), in its preamble emphasizes a new set of values and reinforces the need for basic human rights, democracy, social justice and freedom. As a transitional society attempting to progress from authoritarianism to democracy (Soudien et al., 2004), the Constitution provides a framework for democracy in the country. Democratic schools foster democracy, and it is for this very reason that it can be argued that a strong link exists between the Constitution and democratic schools. It is not surprising that the principals at the sample schools felt strongly that democratic schools should support the country's constitutional democracy. I must point out that studies on democratic schools in other countries (Dobozy, 2007; Moswela 2007; Genç, 2008; Vedøy & Møller, 2007; Wilson, 2009; Davies et al., 2006; Barr, 2007; Keogh & Whyte, 2005) have not emphasized linkage between the constitution of the country and democratic schools.

Perhaps part of the reason for the principals at the case study schools referring to the Constitution can be attributed to the fact that the principals view it as a revolutionary document and a key to liberation. Moreover, they stated explicitly that democratic schools should work within the parameters of the Constitution. In other words, a democratic school should embody the Constitution and more specifically the Bill of Rights (Van Vollenhoven et al., 2006). The principals concurred with the aforementioned assertions, and at Red Star Secondary School the principal elaborated

that the stakeholders in a democratic school support democratic principles. Continuing this line of thought, various authors (Steyn et al., 2004; Van Vollenhoven et al., 2006; Smit & Oosthuizen, 2011; Collinson & Cook, 2007; Kelly, 1995; Aspin 1995; Mncube & Harber, 2010; Adams & Waghid, 2005; Kensler, 2010) have emphasized the notion of stakeholders in democratic schools fostering democratic principles. Accordingly it is necessary to focus on democratic schools and democratic principles.

### **7.2.2 Democratic schools and democratic principles**

Emanating from the idea of democratic schools working within the parameters of the Constitution, it appeared as if the principals intuitively latched onto the notion of democratic schools reflecting democratic principles. In essence, as discussed in the preceding paragraph, it can be established that a democratic school has as its foundation the democratic Constitution of the country. The South African Constitution (RSA, 1996a) reflects universal Western democratic principles like equality, respect and accountability. Moreover, it includes a well-established Bill of Rights that outlines the rights of South African citizens. Democratic schools recognize the value and rights of each individual (Nugent & Mooney, 2008). Even the participants at the schools referred to the rights of the various stakeholders. For example, parent 1 at Red Star Secondary School maintained: “To our principal the rights and views of everyone must be taken into account, and the dignity of all parties preserved”. At both schools the principals emphasized respect for others as well as the need to respect the rights of others.

Kelly (1995) refers to human rights as a basic principle of education in a democratic society that is of significance to democratic schools. In addition, Van Vollenhoven et al. (2006) elaborate that the right to freedom of expression is seen as a pillar of democracy, as it is viewed as a core right in a democracy. However, on the issue of rights Van Vollenhoven et al. (2006) concluded that in South African schools the right to freedom of expression is not currently nurtured. Drawing from the interview responses, observations and document review the principals in the case study schools seem to promote freedom of expression with regard to the stakeholder voice. Though, like some of the respondents at the case study schools I do admit that more can be done to involve learners in all school issues. This is in line with Mncube and Harber’s



(2009, p. 54) finding that learner participation is limited to “trivial issues rather than learners regarded as equal and as active co-governors”. In other words there is a need to explore fully the idea of learners as decision-makers in school.

Extending the preceding argument are Adams and Waghid (2005), who explain that democracy can be viewed as the embodiment of principles, and as such democratic schools are founded on as well as reflect democratic principles (Kelly, 1995; Mncube & Harber, 2010; Kensler, 2010). Consequently in creating democratic schools it is necessary to internalize, implement and reinforce the principles of democracy as they guide a democratic way of life. I am of the view that it is democratic principles that propel the notion and practice of democracy, such that democratic practices become part of us. It follows that democratic principles should become part of all citizens, including young and the old. Participants at both schools referred to various democratic principles. The principal at Excell Secondary School linked democratic schools with democratic principles and succinctly stated that, “as a leader you create the conditions for democracy to prevail. You ensure that democratic principles are followed”.

The principal reinforced the idea of living out democratic principles but also emphasized that it is necessary to create situations for democracy to grow. Wallin (2003) concurs that it is essential for the principal to encourage and put into practice these democratic principles, consequently exposing others to democratic practices. Extending the preceding argument, Harber (2004) appositely explains that democracy is not a characteristic that is inherited; instead it is behaviour that is learnt. It follows that learners need to be exposed to democratic experiences and practices. So schools should put in place structures that will allow learners to learn and practice democracy.

Chapter Three of this dissertation highlighted a range of democratic principles. The participants at both schools made reference to various democratic principles, some of which included shared decision-making, purpose and vision, collaboration, consultation and communication, accountability, transparency and openness, rights of individuals, integrity and trust, critical thinking, interconnectedness of the community and respect. It can therefore be concluded that democratic schools will inevitably emphasize and implement the democratic principles as mirrored in the Constitution of

the RSA. In essence democratic principles shape democratic schools, and as such I move onto discussing the democratic principle of shared decision-making, which was echoed strongly by all stakeholders.

### **7.2.3 Shared decision-making**

All the respondents affirmed the need for shared decision-making in a democratic school. Similar words used by respondents to imply shared decision-making were collective decision-making. This was evident in the following response by parent 1 at Excell Secondary School:

At Excell Secondary collective decision-making, which is a principle of democracy, is upheld. By this I mean that there is shared decision-making and consultation before decisions are taken. (Excell Secondary School parent 1)

From the aforementioned it is evident that the parent had some idea of shared decision-making as a principle of democracy. The principals at the sample schools appeared to embrace the notion of shared decision-making, and this was also evident during my observations. During my observation of a SMT meeting at Red Star Secondary School where the PPN was being discussed I witnessed first-hand how the principal sought input from all management members.

The principal as well as the other management members often used the words 'we' and 'us', suggesting that they were part of a team, which could also imply a feeling of togetherness. In other words, the principal tried to create a sense of unity or oneness. In his attempts to get inputs from other individuals, the principal often asked: "Tell us what you are thinking". This implies that the principal was overtly attempting to get others involved in decision-making. At one point the principal stated: "We need to sort this issue out". These utterances also suggest the notion of shared responsibility with regard to decision-making, hinting towards local participatory democracy. The principal appeared to be trying to get everyone to talk so that they could reach some decision. Similarly, Nyerere (1997, p. 156) points out that this "talking until you agree" is an important point in understanding the traditional African concept of democracy. Moreover the notion of joint action, free discussion and dialogue as well as decision-making by consensus, which the principal appeared to be promoting, are accentuated in the traditional African concept of democracy. Further, Bennis and

Graves (2007) maintain that democratic schools generally centre on shared decision-making.

Shared decision-making stimulates open communication, which again is necessary in democratic environments. Moreover democracy, which requires participation by all, thrives on communication and more specifically on the open exchange of views (Gibson, 2009; Bäckman & Trafford, 2007; Kensler, 2010; Wolk, 1998; Chamberlin, 1989). At this point I recall Dewey's (1916, p. 87) view of democracy as "a mode of associated living of conjoint communicated experience". For Dewey (1916), democracy was linked to the idea of living together with emphasis on collaborative interactions and sharing of experiences. This reinforces my interpretation of shared decision-making as an integral component of democratic schools. The document review at Red Star Secondary School revealed the School Management Plan (2000 p. 2) that read, "... it is vitally important that the whole staff be represented in the processes of decision-making ... members of staff represent themselves and contribute directly to decision-making". This document discloses on paper expectations as well as a commitment to shared decision-making; as evident through observations at the school and interviews, this notion does to an extent translate into practice.

Moreover, during staff briefing meetings, the SMT meeting and SGB meetings that were observed at both schools there was open and free-flowing communication. At briefing sessions the staff were free to pitch their ideas. The respondents at the schools felt the need for shared decision-making; however, at Excell Secondary School teacher 1 and teacher 3 explained that there would be times when decisions would be made by the principal without input from others. Even at Red Star Secondary School teacher 1 had similar thoughts. These teachers suggested that there will be occasions when decisions are made unilaterally, and this did not seem to be an issue with the teachers. Unilateral decision-making suggests that there was no consultation, and this is reminiscent of traditional practices by principals. This view is extended by November et al. (2010), who explain that the principal has traditionally been locked into a paradigm of power that made them authoritative and hence anti-democratic. I must point out that there may be instances where the principal may have to make unilateral decisions. However, these may be exceptions rather than the rule.

Even the principal at Excell Secondary School stated emphatically: “I can tell you there were more instances I was democratic than undemocratic”. Even though in some instances the principals make unilateral decisions, it can be deduced that, generally shared decision-making is authentic at the case study schools. In other words, shared decision-making, which I view as collaborative interaction, is the more dominant form of decision-making at these schools. This shared decision-making contributes towards shared vision and shared purpose.

#### **7.2.4 Shared vision and purpose**

I am of the opinion that coupled with shared decision-making are a shared sense of purpose and shared vision. Shared vision describes views representative of the various stakeholders and which contribute to a shared sense of purpose. The participants were of the opinion that shared vision is essential in a democratic school. I must state that both schools had vision and mission statements. The principal at Red Star Secondary School stated candidly that the school’s vision is not an “individual’s vision but a collective vision”. From this response at Red Star Secondary School it is evident that the school’s vision is important; however, of significance is the fact that the respondent emphasizes the need for shared vision. This implies a fundamental shift from traditional school practices that focused on individual visions, to a need for a collective vision. In her discussion on shared decision-making Red Star Secondary School teacher 1 referred to shared purpose and vision, which accordingly provides focus and direction. I believe that they also have the potential to create collective commitment towards goals. Kensler (2008) appropriately points out that it is essential for individuals to understand the unique contribution they make towards the realization of collective goals. Ultimately shared decision-making is necessary for shared purpose and shared vision.

There is a need for shared vision and shared purpose in a democratic school as it assists in keeping all stakeholders on board with regard to a shared understanding of the institution’s common purpose. As such I posit that shared vision and shared purpose contribute to shared responsibility and collective ownership. Even though the principal is ultimately accountable for the functioning of the school, shared responsibility emphasizes the need for individuals to work as partners. Consequently it is this shared responsibility that facilitates collaboration. Having elaborated on

shared decision-making, shared vision and shared purpose, I now focus on consultation, collaboration and communication.

### **7.2.5 Consultation, collaboration and communication**

In Chapter Three I referred to consultation, collaboration and communication as democratic principles. I opt to refer to these principles, which I believe are inextricably linked, as the three Cs. At the case study schools my observations of brief meetings between individual teachers and the principal as well as individual meetings between parents and the principal revealed open communication. It was not surprising that the principals at both the schools seem to promote consultation, collaboration and communication. It follows that living out a shared vision, as outlined in the preceding theme, requires collaboration (O'Hair et al., 2000). Continuing this view, Apple and Beane (2007) put forth that collaboration is a foundation of democracy itself. Stated simply, at both the schools, there was a trend towards consultation, collaboration and communication.

Consultation can be viewed as a vehicle for shared decision-making. Through the process of consultation, collaboration and communication the relevant stakeholders become engaged in decision-making and this represents a shift from traditional school practices that emphasized unilateral decision-making. At Red Star Secondary School I observed how the principal sought the views of others at meetings. He attempted to get the others to work jointly to reach a decision. He wanted the opinions of others and it appears as though he wanted to stimulate discussion. Baker and Shalit (2008) elaborate that discussion allows for the introduction of perspectives held by others. Again the notion of joint action, free discussion and dialogue, which the principal appeared to be fostering, are accentuated in the traditional African concept of democracy. Furthermore, the idea of teamwork and working together indicates collaboration.

Apple and Beane (2007) agree that in democratic schools the emphasis is on 'us' and 'we' among all stakeholders. Most importantly the principal was attempting to engage the individuals in dialogue and obtain their views. This could also imply that the principal at Red Star Secondary School was attempting to create an interactive climate. Moreover, dialogue is a precondition for consultation and collaboration. The

need for dialogue is aptly pointed out by Apple and Beane (2007, p. 37), who maintain that, “In a democratic school diversity of ideas is prized, discussion and debate is prolonged”.

Taking this point further, November et al. (2010) explain that nurturing a culture of communication in schools implies opening up channels of dialogue; “Without dialogue there can be no communication” (Freire, 2003, pp. 92-93). Thus again the role of dialogue in communication is emphasized. It follows that democracy will only take root if there is free dialogue and discussion on any issue (Steyn et al., 2004). At the schools the principals attempted to engage the various stakeholders in dialogue and they also emphasized the need for listening. It appeared as if the principals were promoting a culture of listening. Extending this line of thought are Steyn et al. (2004), who elaborate that listening is an important element in communication, and a willingness to hear is essential. Dew (1995, as cited in Horner, 1997, p. 284) refers to various skills required for democratic leadership and one of these among others include listening skills. The principal at Excell Secondary School believed that, “... it’s that listening ear that’s critical in a democratic school”. At both the schools respondents viewed the principals as good listeners. It was evident that both the principals practice the art of listening, and this is essential for communication.

At both the schools my observations revealed that the principals were able to relate to others, and these included learners, support staff, teachers and parents. This suggests that the principals were trying to create positive, caring and respectful relationships with others in the school. Bryan and Hayes (2010) concur that creating caring relationships contributes to a democratic environment, and from my observations and interview responses at both schools it was evident that such democratic environments were developing. Democratic structures like the RCL and SGB as well as democratic processes like shared decision-making contributed to the growth of democratic environments.

### **7.3 Democratic structures and democratic processes**

Beane and Apple (1999, p. 10) explain that, “Democratic schools, like democracy itself do not happen by chance. They result from explicit attempts ... to put in place arrangements and opportunities that will bring democracy to life”. One of these

arrangements and opportunities involves creating democratic structures and processes through which life in the school is carried out. Dunstan (1995) refers to these democratic structures in school as participative bodies. These democratic structures and processes contribute to democracy. Maile (2002) and Mncube and Harber (2010) underscore that democratic structures contribute to democratic practices.

The case study schools had fully functioning SGBs and the SASA legitimizes the SGB as a democratic structure with parent representatives and learner representatives. The interviews, observations and document review revealed that there was an RCL and subject committees at the schools. From the responses at both schools, the structures that make the school democratic included the staff representatives, site stewards representing teacher unions, a fully elected RCL, SGB, SMT, peer mediators and learning area committees (which respondents referred to as subject committees). Excell Secondary School teacher 1 and Red Star Secondary School teacher 1 claimed that the learning area committees were able to make their own decisions. In fact, at Excell Secondary School the principal added that it is undemocratic to undermine the decisions of the various committees, and Red Star Secondary School teacher 1 stated that the principal has confidence in the teachers to make decisions among themselves in their committees. In short, the learning area committees are not there merely to serve as tokenism; instead they are structures that promote democracy.

Informal conversations with the learner representatives prior to SGB meetings at both schools revealed that the learner representatives consult with the RCL and the RCL also consults with the larger learner population. Even with the teacher representatives on the SGB, the teachers systematically report to the staff on issues discussed at the SGB meetings. In addition, the representatives also make input on issues on the agenda on behalf of the staff. The teacher representatives at both schools affirmed this. Responses from the learners and teachers did not only provide insight into the functioning of the democratic structures in the schools, but most importantly it was evident that these individuals had an understanding of representative democracy. This was also evident when learner 2 at Red Star Secondary School claimed that the learner representatives are not voicing the learners' concerns adequately. In other words, he felt unrepresented by the learner representatives. Interestingly, at the

sample schools respondents did not mention the parent representatives meeting with the parent body to discuss issues that should be taken to SGB meetings.

With regard to democratic processes the respondents at the schools made reference to collective decision-making, collaboration and voting. Surprisingly, although at both schools the process of voting was used, the respondents did not view voting as the most important feature in a democratic school. However, the RCLs at both schools were democratically elected, and in the documents reviewed reference was made to time allocated for this process. In short, the RCL as a democratic structure provides the learners with direct experience of democracy.

Inclusion of learner voice is essential to democratic processes. From the interviews and observation of SGB meetings it was evident that although the learner voice is represented at the schools, learner participation in crucial issues in both schools is limited. Even the principal confirmed that more could be done to include the learners in deliberations. Drawing on Hart's (1992) ladder of learner participation (as cited in Whitty & Wisby, 2007), it can be concluded that these learners were probably consulted and informed but were not involved in the shared decision-making with adults. However, the written texts in the document review as well as the interviews revealed persuasive evidence that the learners were consulted on minor issues.

Similarly, Mncube and Harber (2009) explored the learner voice in South African schools and concluded that both parents and learners seem to be excluded from policy formulation. Mncube and Harber (2009) made specific reference to the exclusion of parents and learners in formulation of the school code of conduct. At both schools many of the respondents referred to the lack of learner input with regard to the learner code of conduct. At Red Star Secondary School, teacher 1 explained that teachers often merely inform learners about issues. The teacher revealed that the learners are not consulted on all decisions and this again suggests issues related to power relations with regard to the learners and other stakeholders. With regard to the lack of learner participation in this study, perhaps part of the reason is because on the whole principals, teachers and parents are still stuck in traditional school governance practices. Harber (1997b) argues that in the past learners played a minor role in



decision-making, and this argument is corroborated by Squelch (1999), who elaborates that in the past there was minimal participation from teachers, parents or learners.

While not dismissing the fact that at both schools there was learner representation on the SGB, the emerging issue was minimal learner participation in shared school governance. In short, it is necessary to extend learner decision-making powers beyond minor issues. There is a need for greater emphasis on inclusivity of learner voice in shared school governance. Essentially this means a move away from this culture of silence associated with learners, a culture inherited from the South African authoritarian educational system during the apartheid era. Including learners in school governance gives them a sense of belonging and a voice, which in turn enhances healthy relationships between learners, teachers and others in the school community (Neigel, 2006). In essence, inclusion of learners in school governance contributes positively to school relations.

However, responses from Red Star Secondary School learner 2 and Excell Secondary School learner 2 suggested that learner representatives are not adequately voicing the learners' concerns. This is clearly evident in the following comment: "I am concerned that the RCL doesn't really represent the learner voice. ... I just feel that the RCL should represent us more and be more articulate". The respondents' claim suggests that perhaps learner representatives require some form of training to assist in performing their role functions

A promising aspect is that learners are represented on the SGB, and in the case of these schools they make inputs on some school issues, such as the uniform. Parent 1 at Red Star Secondary School provided more detail with regard to the issues that the learners provide input on, and this included classroom behaviour, examination etiquette as well the problem of smoking. Bäckman and Trafford (2007) suggest that the inclusion of individuals in decision-making should not be limited to formal meetings. This would imply that learners should be provided with other avenues than the formal SGB meetings for shared decision-making. Learners should also be involved in shaping the policies in school, which would assist in moving beyond the illusion of a representative democracy. Furthermore, with reference to Hart's (1992) ladder depicting learner participation, both schools need to move towards learner-

initiated decision-making where learners initiate the process and invite adults to join them in decision-making.

Having articulated that there is a need for greater involvement of learners in democratic school governance, I am reminded of the comment made by many of the participants that training of the stakeholders is necessary, and training should include the learner representatives. The principal at Excell Secondary School admitted that the learners require training. Adams and Waghid (2003) pertinently posit that democratic school governance cannot be taken for granted to naturally arise and sustain itself in democratic decision-making structures like the SGBs. Similarly, Van Wyk (2004) found that the training they received influenced the competence of the stakeholder representatives. Essentially the training of all SGB members requires attention, and it is essential that the training should not be done on a once-off basis. Instead there should be a series of training sessions with the focus on developing fundamental skills like deliberation.

## **7.4 Governance in democratic schools**

### **7.4.1 Gender**

The document review, observations and interviews revealed that the schools had SGBs comprising individuals that represented the various stakeholders. Although at both schools (as per the SASA) the parent representatives were the majority, each school had only one female parent representative. When questioned about this, the secretary at Red Star Secondary School informed me that the second female representative “dropped out” as it was difficult to attend meetings. Perhaps the poor response with regard to the female parent governors is indicative of the historically male-dominated South African society. In addition, I noticed that the female parent representatives were not as vociferous as the male parent representatives. Similarly, Botha (2010) in his study noted that in most SGBs female parent representatives were quieter than male parent representatives. In response to the preceding finding, Botha (2010, p. 584) explains that, “The gendered nature of South African citizenry could account for the low profile nature of women in taking decisions”. Perhaps with time and through empowerment of women this situation will be addressed.

Furthermore, even though the sample schools had many African learners, there was only one African parent representative at Red Star Secondary School while there were no African parent representatives at Excell Secondary School. However, attempts were being made to get African parents on the SGB. An informal conversation with parent 1 at Excell Secondary School revealed that African parents were reluctant to come on board. The parent was unsure as to why this was so. However, he did point out that from his experience African parents did not nominate other African parents at the SGB by-elections. Teacher 1 at the same school provided various reasons for African parents being reluctant to come on board. These included the fear of appearing ignorant and ill-equipped to be on the SGB, lack of confidence, lack of exposure to shared school governance, and parents could also feel that they did not have the expertise to be on the SGB. At Red Star Secondary School, parent 3 stated that her involvement with the school was limited because of time and transport issues. She purported that with some IsiZulu-speaking parents there was a communication problem and the feeling that they could not make a significant contribution to the running of the school.

The preceding finding is comparable to Botha's (2010) findings that revealed that African parents in particular are reluctant to participate in school governance. However, parent 1 at Excell Secondary School added that at the next by-election all the SGB members are insisting that an African parent comes on board. With regard to the learner representatives at both schools, the male learner representative was Indian and the female learner representative was black. Thus although the stakeholders of the school community were adequately represented, more needs be done with regard to getting parent representatives from the various sectors of South African society. With reference to the preceding statements I argue that although the Constitution provides a framework for a democratic society it has not sufficiently addressed gender issues and issues of power relations inherited from the apartheid years.

#### **7.4.2 Shared school governance**

At both schools the participants felt that school governance was definitely shared. Shared school governance, according to Singh (2006), is a more democratic form of school governance. In describing his role in school governance the principal at Red Star Secondary School stated that he adopts a democratic style of governance – a key

feature with regard to democratic schools. Hence structures play an essential role in the development of democratic practices, and it follows that democratic governing bodies are essential (Maile, 2002).

Adams and Waghid (2005, p. 25) maintain that, “school governing bodies (SGBs) need to function according to principles of democracy as espoused in the South African Constitution of 1996”. Adams and Waghid (2005) are therefore alluding to the democratic principles within the Constitution and which guide the functioning of the SGBs. I point out that democratic principles guide the practice of shared school governance and this in turn contributes to democratic schools. Mncube (2007a; 2007b) adds that SGBs assist in spreading democratic principles in schools and in society. Democratic governance in educational settings, maintains Keeffe (2004), incorporates two essential features: collaboration and inclusion. In other words, democratic school governance involves cooperation and inclusivity with regard to all stakeholders. Mncube (2007a, p. 106) extends Keeffe’s (2004) argument that democratically governed schools “honour participation, adequate representation, tolerance, deliberation and dialogue and rational discussion which lead to collective decision-making”.

Bäckman and Trafford (2007) purport that democratic school governance is founded on values centred on human rights, empowerment, involvement and participation of all stakeholders. Learner 1 at Red Star Secondary felt that with regard to governance at their school “... there’s a lot of working together - collaboration and basically just working as a team”. Parent 2 at Excell Secondary School claimed that the principal “views the SGB representatives as equal partners. The parents are not afraid to put forth their views”. My observations of the SGB meetings at both schools allowed me to conclude that these meetings were characterized by openness, respect and sharing of ideas, specifically with regard to the teachers, parents and the principal. Similarly, Singh (2006) found that at the core of shared school governance were virtues that included sharing, openness, trust and respect from others.

With reference to Singh’s (2006), Mncube’s (2007a), Keeffe’s (2004) and Bäckman and Trafford’s (2007) description of democratic school governance, at the case study schools aspects like respect, collaboration, participation and inclusion were

emphasized. Notwithstanding minimal learner participation, it would appear that these schools foster democratic school governance. At both schools the principal, teacher representatives and parent representatives on the SGB appeared to be working together. They were focused on a common interest, which was the effective functioning of the school, thus contributing towards a collective identity.

The principal at Red Star Secondary School explained:

My role in school governance has therefore been one mainly of facilitator and co-leader. My task has been mainly to empower stakeholders to function effectively for the benefit of the community. This would then translate to democracy in action. (Red Star Secondary School principal)

The principal saw himself as working together with others and his role was primarily as a facilitator. The principal at Excell Secondary School had a similar response and he also believed that his role was to guide and support the various stakeholders. Both responses from the principals suggest that they have an understanding of the role and function of the SGB. Their responses also imply a move away from traditional school governance, which Squelch (1999, p. 128) asserts was “hierarchical and authoritarian in nature”. However, parent 1 at Excell Secondary School had a differing view and believed that, “At times he [the principal] tends to dominate the SGB meetings”. My observation of SGB meetings did not reveal this. In both schools parents chaired the SGB meetings. At Red Star Secondary School the principal did very little talking and at Excell Secondary School parents turned to the principal for guidance with regard to a sensitive issue pertaining to the looming teachers’ strike. By and large the parents seem to have their eyes (and hands) on the ball – perhaps because these parents were very well educated.

### **7.4.3 Power relations**

With regard to the response from Excell Secondary School parent 1 that the principal sometimes dominates the SGB meetings, the notions of power relations are alluded to. Deem et al. (1995) argue that regardless of the cultural context, power relationships play a significant role in understanding the varied practices and processes of school governance. They (Deem et al., 1995, p. 133) add that, “power relations are an ineradicable feature of the fragile character of governing bodies as organizations”.

Furthermore, Mncube et al. (2011) posit that power relations can hinder the functioning of SGBs. In short, the preceding arguments point to the existence of power relations within governing bodies. Although just one respondent made reference to the principal dominating meetings, I am reminded that at both schools few respondents alluded to the principal sometimes making unilateral decisions. Even though issues of power relations were not overt, some responses suggested subtle nuances of them.

As mentioned, at Excell Secondary School during an SGB meeting parents turned to the principal for guidance with regard to certain issues. In addition, the parent representatives at both schools felt that they were not qualified to comment on curriculum issues. Hence it is evident that lack of knowledge on certain issues can hinder parental participation. Correspondingly, Bush and Heystek (2003) in their study of SGBs in Gauteng concluded that these bodies are not fulfilling their role functions and are relying on the principal to do so. The preceding discussion suggests that there are some problems with parent participation.

### **7.5 Curriculum and teaching methods consistent with democracy**

Of significance are the respondents' utterances as to the need for shared decision-making with regard to the curriculum. Although the idea of shared decision-making came across strongly, it was evident that it fell short with regard to the curriculum. Basically participants felt that there was no shared decision-making or inclusivity when it came to the curriculum design. Conversely, Noddings (1997) as well as Mncube and Harber (2010) refer to the right of learners to contribute to the development of the curriculum. In short, all stakeholders should contribute to the development of the curriculum and within the curriculum itself it is necessary for their voices to be heard.

However, I must point out that Section 21 of the SASA clearly outlines that the SGB can "determine the extra-mural curriculum of the school and the choice of subject options in terms of provincial curriculum policy" (RSA, 1996b, p. 13). Even though there is provision for input, it can be argued that it is limited. However, participants failed to acknowledge this; this could be an oversight on their part, or perhaps they

were not aware of this role function. Drawing from the discussion in the preceding paragraphs, essentially shared decision-making, in my opinion, is a democratic, participatory decision-making process. It involves bringing together the diverse voices of the stakeholders. Learner voice is situated within this notion of shared decision-making, and although at both schools the learner governors were given the platform to articulate their views, the document review and interviews did not reveal learner input on curriculum issues. As pointed out at the very outset, the themes are interrelated, and I have elaborated on learner voice in the preceding theme.

Associated closely with the curriculum are teaching methods. Democratic schools move away from what Freire (2003, p. 72) terms the banking concept of education that, I believe, characterized the apartheid education in South Africa and where the learners are the “depositories and the teacher is the depositor” and the learners merely “receive, memorize and repeat” what they have learnt. In contrast to this, teaching methods that are consistent with democracy focus on learner centredness (Mncube & Harber, 2010). However, OBE as an approach to education emphasizes the active participation of learners (Van der Horst & McDonald, 1997), thus making teaching and learning learner-centred (Mncube & Harber, 2010). At Excell Secondary School the principal, who was not a classroom practitioner, felt that, “the whole issue of learner-centredness is good in theory but difficult to put into practice”. The principal at Red Star Secondary School, who was also not a classroom practitioner, felt that teachers were so caught up with an assessment-driven curriculum that it was difficult to find time to utilize teaching methods consistent with democracy.

The principal stated categorically that teachers are mindful of the need for learner participation and learner voice in lessons. In other words, the teachers were conscious of the need for participatory teaching styles. Another possible explanation for the de-emphasis on learner-centredness, according to the principal at Red Star Secondary School, lies in past school practices that were teacher-centred. Naicker (2006) concurs that the apartheid curriculum, which is referred to as the ‘traditional curriculum’, was dogmatic, authoritarian and teacher-centred. However, Mncube and Harber (2010, p. 619) point out that teaching and learning within a democratic framework should be viewed as an “interactive and cooperative process”. Even the amended National Curriculum Statement Grades R-12: Curriculum and Assessment Policy emphasizes

aspects like teamwork, human rights, inclusivity, and active and critical learning (DoE, 2011). Divergent views with regard to teaching strategies were revealed by the learners, parents and teachers at both schools.

These respondents felt that there was a shift towards learner-centredness where lessons involved debates, discussion and critical thinking. This is consistent with the South African educational curriculum that promotes debate, discussion and critical thought (DoE, 2001, p. 17). Of particular note is that a democratic teaching style encourages discussion and critical thinking rather than memorization and rote learning. At the sample schools the teachers' responses suggested a shift towards a democratic teaching style. The teaching styles referred to by the teachers are consistent with OBE and the national curriculum - and in addition they are democratic teaching styles.

Barr (2007) adds that in a classroom that promotes democratic practices, each learner's voice is equally important and his or her views are equally respected. In addition, a democratic classroom is one where learners have their say on issues related to teaching and learning (Mncube & Harber, 2010). At Excell Secondary School the teacher representative claimed that, "At all times we strive for maximum learner participation". This is indeed a move towards democratic classrooms. Respondents also spoke about discussion and dialogue in classrooms. In line with the preceding statement, Inman and Burke (2002, p. 68) maintain that democratic schools provide opportunities for learners "to be engaged in dialogue about what they learn". Again, within democratic schools the learner voice is emphasized.

The learner representatives at both schools also referred to participatory teaching and learning strategies, thus reaffirming the use of such practices. At Excell Secondary School the response from learner 1 was interesting:

.... we have teach backs - where you know ... person A is going to be teaching a section. Then we teach the section to the class because in case you didn't understand what the teacher was teaching you know - (you've) got someone - your own peer to teach it to you ... you sit down and prepare a lesson. You plan the questions out - you make references to your textbook. You ... take the role of the teacher. (Excell Secondary School learner 1)



Teacher 1 at the same school affirmed the use of teach-backs. The preceding response indicates a shift from teacher-centred to learner-centred classrooms. The learner's reference to 'teach backs' that involved the learner taking "the role of the teacher" also suggests a move towards transforming traditional learner-teacher power relations.

## **7.6 Democratic school culture**

Elaborating on the idea of a democratic culture are November et al. (2010), who maintain that it is essential for principals to learn democratic practices and promote democratic cultures at their schools. Smit and Oosthuizen (2011) posit that a democratic culture will only develop through democratic practices. In this study it was evident that the practice of various democratic principles contributed towards developing a democratic culture in the case study schools. Some of these democratic principles included respect, care, trust, collaboration, communication and consultation.

### **7.6.1 Culture of respect**

Respect can be viewed as a universal democratic principle. Respect for fundamental human rights and the inherent dignity of all individuals are essential to a democratic school culture. Respect and the belief that individuals have a right to be treated respectfully were common characteristics acknowledged by respondents in both schools. This is evident in the explanation provided by the teacher representative at Excell Secondary School:

Respecting the views or opinions of others as well as the dignity of others - if you respect others then you will obviously get the respect you expect from others. Respecting others and their basic human rights will be essential. In a democratic school interactions are based on mutual respect with emphasis on the rights and dignity of others. (Excell Secondary School teacher 1)

The response from the teacher clearly highlights the need for respect in a democratic school. My observations at the schools revealed interactions between learners and learners, learners and teachers, teachers and the principal as well as principal and parents that were pleasant, courteous and polite. In other words, these interactions were based on respect and it appeared that the emphasis was on building respectful relationships. Merriam (1938, as cited in Kensler, 2010) emphasizes the need to promote the essential dignity of each individual, and both schools appeared to

advance such a notion. My observations also revealed that the principals displayed respect and tolerance of diverse religious beliefs. This was evident at both schools when Muslim male learners sought permission to be excused from school on specific days so that they could memorize the holy book; both principals consented.

### **7.6.2 Culture of care and trust**

In creating democratic schools the emphasis is on nurturing sincere care within the school community. At the school sites I experienced a ‘warm feel’ and the friendliness and courtesy of the learners and teachers were clearly evident. Furthermore, on my first visit to Excell Secondary School two female learners greeted me and escorted me to the administration block. It felt as if they were taking care of me. The principals at both schools believed in establishing an ethic of care and love for others. At Red Star Secondary School, parent 1 commented as follows:

Our principal, X, cares deeply about everybody around him and can be cast in the mould of somebody who respects his school and all stakeholders, associated with it. (Red Star Secondary School parent 1)

The preceding response aptly describes the caring characteristics of the principal and was echoed by other respondents in the school. Respondents at Excell Secondary School provided similar comments about the principal at their school. In addition, both principals believed that listening to others was one of the ways of developing an ethic of care. My observations also revealed collegial staff relationships and interactions between teacher and learners that were characterized by care and respect.

### **7.6.3 Culture of listening**

As mentioned in the preceding paragraph, the principals believed that listening to others was one of the ways of developing an ethic of care. Both principals believed that it was necessary to listen to others. The parent representative at Red Star Secondary School remarked that the principal “is well versed in the art of listening”. At Excell Secondary School the principal commented: “the most important - you listen to your learners. You afford them that voice ... So it’s that listening ear that’s critical in a democratic school”. My observations corroborated the interview responses, suggesting that the principals were developing a culture of listening.

Schoeman (2005) argues that respecting others includes listening to their opinions. Moreover, democratic schools emphasize the need to listen to each other (Springate & Lindridge, 2010). Individuals feel valued when they are listened to, and this contributes to a culture of care, trust and respect. I am also of the opinion that listening is fundamental to communication and collaboration as listening allows the listener to become fully engaged in what the speaker is saying so as to understand what is being said. Hartz-Karp and Meister (2011) point out that listening is an important component in deliberations.

#### **7.6.4 Culture of participation, communication, consultation and collaboration**

A democratic school culture is characterized by a lot of human interaction (Meier, 2003), thus suggesting high levels communication and participation with regard to the stakeholders. Observations of the staff and SGB meetings as well as responses from the interviews at both schools revealed that there was a culture of participation, consultation, collaboration and support. In the schools there was also a sense of togetherness. Although both schools fell short with regard to maximum learner participation at SGB meetings, there was evidence of a participative, supportive school environment with respectful interaction. Moreover, there was an atmosphere of mutual trust, tolerance, cooperation, and respect. Frank and Huddleston (2009) point out that it is essential to create an environment in which individuals are aware that they can contribute to school decision-making. With regard to creating such an environment, both the schools encouraged such a notion. These schools seem to create a school culture that promotes democratic practices. As such I would argue that in creating a democratic school the emphasis is on participation, consultation and collaboration. There is also a need to co-operate in mutual trust and good faith.

A democratic school culture that focuses on participation, consultation and collaboration would also emphasize interrelatedness of the school, home and community. The relationship between the school and the community is essential, and it is therefore important to foster school-community relationships. Both the schools were willing to establish partnerships with the community, but there was a general feeling from respondents at the schools that there should be greater parental involvement. The principal at Red Star Secondary School stated that he attended local community events, especially the community police forums. In this way he was able

to get the support of the police and forge links with the community. During my stay at the school I witnessed first-hand the presence of the police in order to find out if ‘everything was running smoothly’. I must point out that this form of partnership or intervention by the police differs greatly from police intervention during the 1976 youth protests in Soweto during the apartheid era. The Soweto uprising saw police indiscriminately shoot, arrest and terrorize youth. In contrast, the police at the schools were calm, considerate and concerned about security issues with regard to the school.

From the above I am of the opinion that democratic schools foster a democratic culture that embraces the cultures of respect, care and trust, listening and participation, communication, consultation and collaboration.

## **7.7 Leadership in democratic schools**

### **7.7.1 Post-heroic leadership**

A common thread running through the interviews and observations was the distinct notion of shared leadership. There was a shift from the top-down notion of power and control as associated in the past with the principal, to a unifying view of shared leadership. The response from teacher 1 at Red Star Secondary School clearly illustrated this argument, “I think these days principals realize that one person does not run the school”. At Excell Secondary School parent 1 stated that she sees a “move away from the heroic one-man leadership” that she witnessed as a learner. Thus at both schools there was an impression that leadership was not in the hands of one person. From the principals’ responses, document review and observations it was evident that their notion of leadership transcends the traditional notion of leadership that emphasized the principal as the sole leader in the school.

The individual-focused heroic approach to leadership according to Gronn (2003, p. 17) is the notion of the “hero paradigm” and has been challenged; shifting the focus on to what Oduro (2004) refers to as the post-heroic model. The latter places emphasis on aspects like participation, collective leadership, teamwork, empowerment and, most importantly, having little control over others. At the case study schools all the respondents referred to the principals as democratic leaders. The notion of a democratic leader leans towards the post-heroic model of leadership. The

principal at Red Star Secondary School believed that others in the school “can take the institution further”. This statement not only points towards the principal’s faith in others, but also most significantly implies that the principal views others in the school as leaders. Hence it also suggests that the principal is moving beyond the individual-focused heroic approach to leadership.

### **7.7.2 Servant leadership**

In describing his leadership style, the principal at Red Star Secondary School did not see himself as an authority figure in a position of power, instead he believed that his role extended to serving the school community. He stated categorically that it is important to lead democratically. Prinsloo (2003) contends that traditionally leadership referred to dominance where subordinates often accepted the instructions and control of another person. However, from my observations at the case study schools it was apparent that the principals did not wield power and authority. My observations confirmed that the principals at the schools were able to work in participative and democratic ways. The principals spoke about working as a team-and at these schools leadership was to a large extent characterized by collaboration and team efforts. As evident from earlier arguments, teamwork provides opportunities for collaboration, consultation and communication. The staff briefing sessions that I observed at the schools were similarly characterized by a spirit of cooperation and teamwork as everyone made attempts to pull in the same direction.

Interestingly, the principal at Red Star Secondary School stated categorically that he is not there for personal goals. Instead he referred to serving the community and his response points towards the notion of servant leadership. Both these principals believed in supporting team members, promoting shared decision-making and caring behaviour, as well as empowering and developing the potential of staff so that they could give of their best. These characteristics refer to servant leadership (Cunningham, 2008; Serrat, 2009; Spears, 2010). These principals were good listeners, empathetic, committed to the growth of people and were also concerned about building the community (Spears, 2010). Again these characteristics reflect servant leadership.

### **7.7.3 Ubuntu**

Parent 1 and teacher 3 at Excell Secondary School professed that the principal fosters a spirit of Ubuntu (Mabovula, 2008; Bush, 2007b; Msila, 2008; Venter, 2004; Manala, 2002), as he (the principal) believes in the interconnectedness of individuals and team effort. Manala (2002) aptly states that interdependence features prominently in Ubuntu, and again the interconnectedness among individuals is emphasized. In extending this idea, Msila (2008) reports that Ubuntu not only can be applied to leadership in South African schools but also has the potential to enhance leadership. Democratic schools emphasize among others, shared decision-making, a shared value system and shared vision (O’Hair et al., 2000). In addition, the notion of shared decision-making and shared vision suggests the need for interconnectedness among individuals. In short, democratic schools cannot have stakeholders functioning in isolation. From this perspective Ubuntu fosters interdependence and interconnectedness among individuals and as such has the potential to add impetus to leadership in democratic schools.

### **7.7.4 Democratic leadership**

At both the schools respondents viewed the principal as a democratic leader embracing participative leadership and allowing others to become involved in the functioning of the school. Consistent with this view, O’ Hair et al. (2000) contend that leadership in democratic schools is viewed as acts that may come from anyone in the school community. This will include the principals, learners, parents, teachers, support staff, individuals from the community and department officials. Essentially leadership in the sample schools was shared, and there appeared to be a move away from the stereotyped authoritarian thinking and behaviour associated with the principal. With both principals emphasizing shared leadership, it is not surprising that both had faith in the potential of others.

At both these schools critical thinking was encouraged. Observations and interview responses revealed that the principal at Red Star Secondary School sought input from his staff during meetings. It appeared as though he preferred solutions to issues at hand to emanate from others. At the same school parent 1 spoke about the incident after a protracted teachers’ strike where the principal opted to deliberate with learners and teachers on the issue of learner examinations. Learners and teachers were

provided a platform to air their views and discuss solutions, as teacher 3 affirmed that the principal “wants to hear what you are thinking.” In other words the principal wanted deliberation and participation from those in the school community who will be most affected by the decisions taken. Gastil (1994, p. 960) points out that democratic leaders guide the deliberative process by ensuring constructive participation. Constructive participation, according to Gastil (1994, p. 960), implies “defining, analyzing, and solving group problems through deliberation”. In short, individuals involved are encouraged to offer possible solutions.

Even at Excell Secondary School respondents stated that the principal prefers if “you come to him with solutions to problems”. This statement strengthens my argument that democracy is not about persuading individuals to accept a particular view but rather it involves working together to find a solution. At both schools teachers and learners referred to the promotion of critical thinking in the classroom. The above points to the argument that democratic schools promote critical thinking (Beane & Apple, 1999; Inman & Burke, 2002; Bryan & Hayes, 2010; Mncube & Harber, 2010). The existence of democracy is dependent on individuals who are articulate and who can think critically (Frank & Huddleston, 2009; Van Vollenhoven et al., 2006; Steyn et al., 2004). In other words a democracy requires critical thinkers. It follows that the principals as democratic leaders promote critical thinking.

As mentioned the principals at the sample sites encouraged stakeholders to provide solutions to problems and the respondents claimed that the principal was a good listener. Although listening has been referred to as one of the skills required in democratic leadership, I extend this idea by stating that active listening is a key factor in democratic leadership. The word active denotes that there is some type of response from the listener and this could include gestures or even paraphrasing. The notion of democratic leaders promoting effective listening skills is grounded in my argument that active listening suggests that the leader values the inputs (voices) of all stakeholders and as such this act of attentive listening has the potential to contribute to the development of trust, respect and commitment. Wasonga (2009, p. 209) adds that, “listening to other voices demonstrates a conscious understanding of the significant value of others”. Furthermore active listening encourages the speaker to

continue speaking. Hence a democratic leader is always willing to listen to stakeholder voices.

In my explication for active listening I refer to Prinsloo (2003, p. 144) who maintains that democratic leaders promote “two-way communication”. This notion of “two-way communication” hinges on active listening skills. Furthermore O’Hair et al. (2000), Gastil (1994) and Ediger and Rao (2007) refer to democratic leadership and critical thinking. However, I must point out that effective listening is a fundamental skill for critical thinkers. This is because listening allows the listener to become fully engaged in what the speaker is saying so as to understand what is being said. This would also mean trying to gauge the perspectives put forth by the speakers. From the above it is evident that active listening is a key factor in democratic leadership. Although Dew (1995, as cited in Horner, 1997), and Gastil (1994) refer to listening skills and democratic leadership I argue that effective listening is central to democratic leadership. In addition as discussed democratic leaders promote critical thinking.

#### **7.7.5 Distributed leadership**

At both schools the principals believed in drawing on the expertise of others. Although the participants at the schools did not refer specifically to distributed leadership, they did make reference to the idea of leadership being extended beyond the actions of the school principal. For example, at Excell Secondary School the principal believed that, “Everybody can do something. Not all five fingers are the same but each one of them performs a different function... You draw on the expertise ...”. The principal stated categorically that there is a need to draw on the expertise of others. In the same vein, Spillane et al. (2007) link distributed leadership with leadership being extended to others in the institution. The idea of extending leadership to others in the institution implies interdependence and interconnectedness among all stakeholders. Extending this argument, Leithwood et al. (2006) elaborate that distributed leadership puts emphasis on the idea of interdependence among all individuals. Inevitably the idea of interrelatedness is alluded to.

Although the responses suggested distributed leadership, in creating a democratic school I would argue for a democratic distributed perspective of leadership, since



firstly it offers an alternative perspective of leadership in democratic schools. Secondly, there is a move away from the notion of a 'one-man team' and instead school-wide leadership is emphasized. In addition, there is a move away from the notion of leadership being the monopoly of those in positions of power. Moreover, Spillane (2005) argues that within the distributed perspective of leadership, leadership can be democratic or autocratic. With this in mind, perhaps it is necessary to focus on democratic distributed leadership in democratic schools. Essentially a democratic distributed perspective of leadership "intentionally positions all members of a school community as potential sources of leadership" (Youngs, 2007, p. 7). Thus inclusion of all stakeholders with regard to leadership is emphasized. However, it is evident that at both schools the principals viewed leadership as a collective effort.

#### **7.7.6 Role of the principal**

While the participants at the schools focused on shared leadership and a move away from the ideology of control with regard to the principal, all the participants referred to the critical role of the principal in creating a democratic school. At Red Star Secondary School, the principal drew an interesting parallel between the role of a conductor in an orchestra and that of a principal in a democratic school. The conductor leads individuals and attempts to unify the efforts of various individuals. This similarity has significance since principals attempt to unify individual attempts, which will contribute to shared vision and purpose. In essence the principal has a pivotal role.

Although the participants, including the principals, emphasized shared decision-making, the principals at both schools stated that they were ultimately accountable. They acknowledged their status as representatives of the DoE and explained that they were accountable to the DoE, to the parents and learners. The accountability to the parents and learners is emphasized in the SASA. Furthermore, Bezzina (1997, as cited in Beckmann & Blom, 2000) underscores that accountability is an essential element of democracy. Further, accountability is inextricably linked to concepts such as participation, decentralization, empowerment and transparency (Maile, 2002). Hence it is fundamental to school governance (Maile, 2002). Even though leadership appears to be shared, principals are ultimately accountable to the DoE and various

stakeholders for the performance of the school. In short, in extending leadership principals cannot shift their accountability to others.

The participants revealed that principals play central roles in shaping democratic schools. Apple and Beane (2007, p. 37) appositely state that principals have an integral role because they are expected to lead the school and “whether they lead by control or by collaboration sets the tone for the school”. Elaborating on the aforementioned, Frank and Huddleston (2009, p. 27) maintain that unless principals are able to recognize the value of more democratic forms of organization and are keen to advance their schools along that path, “little real change is likely to take place”. Again the fundamental role of the principal is emphasized.

Although the participants at both schools and various authors (Apple & Beane, 2007; Steyn et al., 2004; Frank & Huddleston, 2009; Aspin, 1995) refer to the key role of principals in democratic institutions, Beane and Apple (1999) focus on schools where democracy was brought to life through the efforts of individuals other than the principal. However, at both schools the principals appeared to take on significant roles in moving the schools to become more democratic. The principals in the case study schools displayed strikingly similar characteristics. These included commitment, openness, integrity, listening skillfully to the voices of stakeholders, having faith in others, and excellent communication and interpersonal skills. They also respected the rights and dignity of others and were caring and supportive of others. Schools require commitment and active participation of principals in the process of creating and sustaining democracy in schools. The principal of Excell Secondary School aptly concludes that, “The role of the principal is to create the conditions in which democracy thrives”.

## **7.8 Fundamental factors that support the further democratization of schools**

### **7.8.1 Shared decision-making and stakeholder voice**

Although the respondents were not posed with the question pertaining to the factors that support further democratization of schools, these were alluded to in responses to the various interview questions. The most important factor that the respondents referred to revolved around advancing shared decision-making. As such, democratic schools value stakeholder voices thus accentuating inclusivity. Shared decision-

making allows for wider participation and inclusivity. Related to inclusivity is the idea of working together rather than individuals working in a vacuum; hence joint action and collective effort are emphasized. Learner 1 at Red Star Secondary School felt that democratic schools allow for participation of all stakeholders, even individuals from the community. Hence teacher 1 at the same school added: “Involvement of people from outside of the school environment can help a school grow and develop”. Similarly, parent 2 from Excell Secondary School concurred that,

There is contribution from all stakeholders who are working towards a common vision for the school then inevitably this would contribute to the school functioning effectively. There’s no hidden agenda. Everyone understands where they want the school to be in two or three years. Because by working together there is a greater chance of yielding better results. (Excell Secondary School parent 2)

Although the respondent emphasized the need to work together, she also believed that the school could improve if principals, learners and teachers are jointly responsible for decisions that affect the school. In short, the respondents felt that through working together democratic schools contribute towards school improvement. In a study of the practice of learner democracy in four European countries (Denmark, Germany, The Netherlands and Sweden), Davies and Kirkpatrick (2000, p. 82) concluded that, “when pupils had a voice and were accorded value, the school was a happier place; when pupils are happy and given dignity, they attend more and they work more productively”. However, I must add that in this study learner involvement in decision-making was restricted to minor issues.

Teacher 1 at Excell Secondary School felt that, “shared decision-making encourages all stakeholders to take ownership of the decisions”. This idea was echoed by teacher 1 at Red Star Secondary School and is highlighted in the following statement: “When teachers feel that they are part of a decision. They make the decision together. Then they take ownership of it”. With the teachers engaged in decision-making this would imply that there is commitment and joint responsibility with the implementation of the decisions. Basically the teachers were of the opinion that shared decision-making encourages ownership of the decisions. Affirming the aforementioned is Harber (1997a) who adds that rules are better kept by learners and teachers if they are democratically agreed upon.

At Excell Secondary School, the principal alluded to some form of synergism that contributes to the interconnectedness of individuals in the school community. Corroborating the notion of interconnectedness was Excell Secondary School parent 1 who claimed that, “he [the principal] ... believes in the interconnectedness of individuals and team effort”. Shared decision-making accentuates the idea of teamwork and individuals work as a unit rather than in isolation to achieve shared goals. I am of the opinion that teamwork promotes critical thinking and problem solving.

### **7.8.2 Democratic schools and listening**

Another factor that is crucial to promoting the democratization of schools is the ability to listen to others. I am of the opinion that shared decision-making involves listening to the views of others. The principals at the case study schools believed in and practiced the art of listening. At both schools respondents frequently mentioned the principal’s ability to listen to others and Red Star Secondary School learner 1 valued being listened to. With this in mind, I am of the opinion that listening has the potential to contribute to a caring environment, increase understanding and cooperation. Elaborating on listening within the notion of shared decision-making, Davies et al. (2006, p. 2) found that learner self-esteem as well as teacher-learner relationships improved as learners felt that they were listened to.

Shared decision-making exposes others to alternate suggestions, viewpoints and ideas. As such this process has the potential to empower all those individuals involved in decision-making. Shared decision-making suggests that leadership is extended to others, thus implying that leadership in democratic schools moves beyond the notion of a one-man leader. In addition, a predominantly autocratic leadership style is discordant with democratic school practices. Interestingly, in an exploratory study by Harris and Chapman (2002, p. 2) on successful leadership practices and school improvement strategies in secondary schools in England, principals “acknowledged that they had all adopted autocratic leadership approaches at critical times”. However, they concurred that adopting autocratic leadership “was least likely to lead to sustained school improvement” (Harris & Chapman, 2002, p. 2).

### **7.8.3 Democratic schools and human rights**

At both schools respondents referred to democratic schools emphasizing the rights of individuals. Similarly, Mncube and Harber (2010), Beane and Apple (1999), Knight and Pearl (2000) and Davies (1999b) affirm that promoting democracy in schools involves upholding the rights of all individuals. In extending this argument, Nugent and Mooney (2008) posit that democratic schools advocate the value and rights of each individual, and this includes the learners' right to express an opinion. Essentially in democratic schools the rights of all individuals, especially learners are respected and protected. In other words democratic schools are committed to human rights. The promotion of basic human rights in democratic schools can be viewed as an ethical justification. Within the context of this study, as stated by the principals, the Bill of Rights as enshrined in the Constitution of the RSA has to be put into practice. Section 39 (1a) in the Bill of Rights stresses the need to advance values like human dignity, equality and freedom so as to create an open and democratic society (RSA, 1996a). Promoting the rights of individuals is fundamental to supporting democratization of schools.

### **7.8.4 Democratic schools and a democratic curriculum**

At both schools respondents referred to a democratic curriculum thus implying that democratic schools promote a democratic curriculum. A democratic curriculum has the inputs of all stakeholders and although respondents agreed that there was a democratic curriculum they acknowledged that stakeholder input into the curriculum was sadly lacking. A democratic curriculum emphasizes a curriculum that is learner-centred, relevant and meaningful to the learner. All respondents, except one, felt that teaching and learning was learner-centred. They also claimed that the content taught was of significance to learners and that there was a move towards teaching-learning strategies that included discussion, participation and interaction.

At the schools the respondents referred to the national curriculum promoting critical thinking. Ten Dam and Volman (2004, p. 360) elaborate, "critical thinking is a crucial aspect in the competence citizens need to participate in ... a democratic society". Furthermore Sardoc (2003, as cited in Dürr, 2005) contend that critical thinking is a precondition for participating in democratic processes. Even the amended National Curriculum Statement Grades R-12: Curriculum and Assessment Policy emphasizes

active and critical learning (DoE, 2011). Interestingly, at Excell Secondary School respondents mentioned that the principal preferred if they come to him with solutions to their problems rather than just the problems experienced. During an informal conversation with the principal he reiterated: “There’s always a solution to every problem”. At Red Star Secondary School I witnessed the principal trying to get ideas to address the issue of the PPN. In addition many of the respondents believed that the teachers promoted critical thinking amongst learners. It was evident that democratic schools promote critical thinking.

Drawing from the above a curriculum that promotes critical thinking, is democratic and learner-centred supports democratization of schools. Having articulated the factors that are fundamental to supporting further democratization of schools as evident from the data, I turn to the factors that constrain the further democratization of schools.

## **7.9 Factors that constrain the further democratization of schools**

Harber and Davies (1998, p. 151) point out that Winston Churchill “once described democracy as the worst system of government apart from all the others”. It follows that democratic schools, like democracy, are far from perfect. Similarly, Adams and Waghid (2005) as well as Beane and Apple (1999) explain that democracy involves tensions and conflicts. At the case study schools the participants referred to factors that impede the process of developing more democratic schools. A discussion of these challenges follows.

### **7.9.1 Time**

One of the challenges referred to at both schools was that democratic decision-making processes can be time-consuming. Respondents alluded to issues that require immediate responses, and in such cases a delayed response as a result of getting stakeholder input could impact negatively on the functioning of the school. Extending the aforementioned idea are Woods and Gronn (2009, p. 437), who assert that, “decisions may be delayed substantially and the direction of the organization rendered unclear by prolonged debates”. Basically Woods and Gronn (2009) are

stating that apart from decisions being delayed, the focus of the school could be affected.

The rigid nature of the timetable was believed to hinder democratic practices. Similarly, Barr (2007) commented on the school day that was divided into periods and as such hindered democratic practices. Linked closely to the time table was the national curriculum which respondents referred to as prescriptive. The curriculum outlined aspects that had to be completed and respondents felt that its prescriptive nature worked against democracy. In addition, some of the respondents felt that the curriculum was assessment driven. Frank and Huddleston (2009) also posit that the existing curriculum over-emphasized learner assessment placing practical restrictions on democratic practices.

### **7.9.2 Lack of training and orientation in democratic participation**

Another constraining factor to the process of developing more democratic schools was the issue of training of SGB members. Respondents stated emphatically that training of stakeholders requires urgent attention. Similarly, Mncube (2009a) maintains that parent governors lack the necessary skills required to execute duties that they are assigned, and suggest the need for ongoing training. Further, Bush and Heystek (2003) as well as Tsotetsi et al. (2008) in their studies recommended training or capacity building for the stakeholder representatives on the SGB. I am of the opinion that all teachers, learners and parent representatives on the SGB need to be trained in skills in deliberation, debate, dialogue and managing differences. My argument is that we are only 18 years into democracy and due to apartheid many individuals were not exposed to open communication and deliberation.

### **7.9.3 In-service training for teachers on democratic schooling**

An issue that emerged from the data was the training of teachers in democratic schooling. For example, teacher 1 at Excell Secondary School spoke about the mindsets of the staff members. He claimed that, “in many schools teachers and principals may still be stuck in past practices that revolve around authoritarianism”. The aforementioned response alludes to the need for teachers to be trained for democratic schooling. Ryan and Rottmann (2009, p. 474) elaborate that our schools are centred on “deeply entrenched hierarchical relationships” that work against

democratic practices. I have mentioned in the previous paragraph that training of stakeholders is necessary; however, training or capacity building related to advocacy skills and leadership development should not be specifically for the SGB members. Instead all teachers need to be exposed to this. Still on the issue of teachers and democracy, Mncube and Harber (2010, p. 623) refer to “the shortage of teachers trained in democratic ways of operating in the school and classroom”. Ultimately teachers need to be trained to teach in democratic schools.

From the preceding statements it is evident that teachers require in-service training focusing specifically on democratic schools. Frank and Huddleston (2009) are also of the opinion that democratic schools require new skills of teachers and training that is fundamental and is lacking in many countries. To sum up, Harber and Serf (2006) point out that for schools to operate democratically, teachers need to learn ways of working democratically in both the whole school and the classroom.

#### **7.9.4 Democracy and apartheid ideologies**

Both the principals felt that some teachers in the school were still influenced by the ideologies that they were indoctrinated with in the apartheid era. The principal of Excell Secondary School suggested that individuals require time to develop democratic ideals. Klinker (2006) adds to this argument by commenting that cultivating deep democratic ideals takes time. Moreover, Davidoff and Lazarus (2002) strengthen this argument by asserting that few schools were able to shift away from the rigid authoritarianism that characterized South African culture. However, there is a need to influence these individuals to move away from these ideas and to embrace democratic principles and practices. In doing so it is necessary for individuals to first internalize the notion of democracy before it is practised. However, it must be pointed out that there are various conceptions of democracy (Woods, 2005) and the principal of Excell Secondary School articulated this.

It follows that schools need to define what democracy means to them, and then only can individuals internalize the notion of democracy that can then lead to its practice. Collinson and Cook (2007) as well as Ekholm (2004) maintain that time needs to be set-aside for learners and teachers to discuss democracy in their schools. Adams and Waghid (2005) elaborate that for structures to operate democratically, its participants



require an understanding of what democracy is. In addition, participants “need to be educated and empowered regarding the principles of democracy” (Adams & Waghid, 2005, p. 25). It follows that it is essential for stakeholders to arrive at an understanding of what democracy is.

### **7.9.5 Power relations**

Linked to apartheid ideologies is the notion of power relations. At Excell Secondary School the principal was of the opinion that relationships between learners and some teachers could hinder democratic school practices. Red Star Secondary School parent 2 echoed a similar view. In other words, reference was made to hierarchical power relations between learners and teachers. However, I must emphasize that these respondents felt that not all teachers viewed themselves in a position of authority. With unequal power relations between learners and teachers, learners assume passive roles and are expected to submissively conform to what adults think is best for them. Teachers, on the other hand, are viewed as figures of authority. Democratic schools move away from traditional, hierarchical power relations towards egalitarian relationships between learners and teachers. Furthermore, Red Star Secondary School parent 3 and Excell Secondary School parent 2 felt that the hierarchical, rigid structure of the education system works against democracy. One of the respondents mentioned that there was no consultation between principals and department officials. Principals were also accustomed to receiving instructions from department officials hence this lack of consultation poses a challenge to democracy in schools.

### **7.9.6 Contradictions of representative democracy**

SGBs are sites of representative democracy and Red Star Secondary School parent 2 raised concern about shared school governance being in the hands of SGB representatives. In other words, the parent suggested that shared school governance could be limited to the few individuals on the SGB. Similarly, Rancière (2006, p. 53) refers to representative democracy as an oxymoron and as such views representative democracy as “an oligarchic form, a representation of minorities ...”. Rancière (2006) raises doubts about representative democracy, which he believes is a representative oligarchy, thus questioning if the majority is being truly represented. In addition, learner 2 at Red Star Secondary School was apprehensive about learner

representatives not voicing the learners' concerns adequately. Again the notion of representative democracy is questioned and if not addressed could hinder democracy in schools.

### **7.9.7 Parent apathy**

Democracy depends on the participation of people and accordingly democratic schools require the participation of all stakeholders. At the case study schools respondents felt that parent apathy hinder democratic participation. Reasons regarding parent apathy included lack of time to attend meetings, transport and communication issues. Red Star Secondary School parent 3 spoke about parents believing that they cannot contribute significantly to the running of the school. It must be pointed out that during the apartheid years parental participation in school governance was limited (Squelch, 1999). Although parents are provided the opportunity to become involved in the running of the school, majority do not seize this opportunity for the reasons outlined above.

### **7.10 Conclusion**

This chapter discussed the various themes that emerged from the data. These included the association between the Constitution, democratic principles and democratic schools. This theme highlights the need to link the Constitution of the RSA and its related democratic principles with democratic schools. Democratic schools are founded on as well as reflect democratic principles (Kelly, 1995; Mncube & Harber, 2010; Kensler, 2010). Furthermore, democratic schools infuse democratic principles in the day-to-day school life, so as to promote a democratic way of life. From the observations, interviews and document review, democratic principles like respect, human rights, shared decision-making, shared vision and purpose as well as consultation, collaboration and communication were clearly evident at the sample schools. Principals and teachers promoted critical thinking and as such the notion of democratic schools encouraging critical thinking was emphasized. In addition, democratic schools seem to foster a democratic school culture that emphasizes participation, consultation and collaboration.

Another theme was democratic structures and processes. Democratic schools require democratic structures and processes. The principals at the schools ensured that the

necessary democratic structures like the RCL, SGB and learning area committees were in place. They also encouraged democratic processes like shared decision-making and voting. A central feature with regard to democratic schools is democratic school governance, which is legitimated through the democratic structure of the SGB where parents, learners and teachers are represented.

Although the learners were represented on the SGB, at both schools there is a need for greater involvement of learners in democratic school governance as learner participation was limited to minor issues. In addition, at the schools I witnessed minimal learner participation at the SGB meetings, and respondents believed that democratic schools require commitment and active participation of principals. A common thread running through the interviews and observations was the distinct notion of shared leadership. Respondents at both schools referred to the principals as democratic leaders. They were considered to be good listeners, who fostered critical thinking. Hence it is evident that active listening is fundamental to democratic leadership. In addition, democratic leaders advance critical thinking. Moreover, at these schools the notion of leadership being extended to others in the school community as well as the interdependence among individuals implied that distributed leadership was being promoted. However, I argue for a democratic distributed perspective of leadership since the emphasis is on the inclusion of all stakeholders with regard to leadership.

Within the classroom there was a shift towards learner-centredness. However, respondents at the schools raised concern with regard to the lack of shared decision-making or inclusivity in curriculum design. Finally, there are factors that support and constrain the further democratization of schools. Some of the factors that support the further democratization of schools include shared decision-making and stakeholder voice, listening and a democratic curriculum. Factors that constrain the further democratization of schools include power relations, parent apathy and lack of training and skills necessary for deliberation.

Having provided a synopsis of this chapter I will now focus on the final chapter of my thesis, in which I present a summary of the major findings, outline recommendations, highlight issues for further research and finally conclude the study.

## **CHAPTER EIGHT: SUMMARY, RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS**

### **8.1 Introductory remarks**

This study aimed to explore the experiences and practices of school principals in creating, leading and governing democratic schools, and as I trace the path of my study I realize that I have reached that juncture where I am required to wrap up my study. Hence, in this concluding chapter I present a summary of the major findings and address the three critical research questions that guided this study. Thereafter I outline recommendations that emanated from the findings, including recommendations regarding issues for further research. I include a model that offers a comprehensive, coherent theoretical account as to how principals can create, lead and govern democratic schools. Subsequently I close this chapter and this study that has taken me on a memorable and most edifying journey.

### **8.2 Summary of findings**

#### **8.2.1 Notions of a democratic school**

With regard to the participants' understanding of the notion 'democratic school', as outlined in research question one, there were varied responses. However, these responses captured the essence of various democratic principles. Nevertheless, what was common was that the participants at both schools linked a democratic school with the Constitution.

At both schools the principals stated categorically that democratic schools should function within the context of the Constitution. In other words, democratic schools have constitutional links. The Constitution of the RSA, the supreme law, gives direction as to how the country should be run and protects democratic principles as well as the rights of its people. It follows that the Constitution shapes the democracy of the country and as such lays the foundation for democratic schools. This is because the Constitution guides and supports the democratization of education and contributes to a democratic way of life in school. The findings revealed that it is necessary for principals to work within the parameters of the Constitution. Hence democratic schools support the Constitution and as such reflect the ideals of the Constitution.

Accordingly, democratic schools attempt to (what I term) ‘live the Constitution’, and these principals are attempting to bring the Constitution to life in their schools.

The respondents at the schools referred to various democratic principles and felt that democratic schools promote democratic principles enshrined in the Constitution. Furthermore, there were some democratic principles that were common at both schools. These commonalities comprised shared decision-making and the inclusion of all stakeholders, and the need for shared purpose and shared vision. Both schools advanced the notion of democratic schools promoting critical thinking, accountability and respecting the rights and dignity of all individuals. Collaboration, consultation and communication were also common democratic principles that the participants referred to. Some of the participants mentioned the need for representation of the various stakeholders as well as democratic schools embracing diversity. Although participants at Excell Secondary School referred to the notion of interconnectedness between the school and the community, and individuals being accorded equal value, trust, integrity, transparency and openness as characteristics of a democratic school, these were accentuated to a greater degree at Red Star Secondary School.

There was a shared language with regard to the notion of democratic schools, and from the rich descriptions of democratic schools I was able to conclude that at both these schools the principals were moving towards becoming ‘democratically minded’. Although they claimed they had democratic worldviews, I believe that they were functioning within the notion of thin democracy and perhaps aspiring towards thick democracy. To substantiate my argument I refer to the comment made by some respondents that at times the principal makes decisions unilaterally. The occasional unilateral decision-making by the principal should not be viewed in isolation, resulting in the statement that the principal is undemocratic or adopting practices similar to that of an authoritarian leader. The principal is generally democratic and moving a school from being less democratic to more democratic as depicted in Figure 3.2 does not imply a simple linear progression. There would be situations that will result in the school becoming less democratic as depicted in Figure 3.2. What I am alluding to is that the few occasions of ‘undemocratic practices’ could instead result in the principal as well as the school being less democratic rather than undemocratic. More democratic suggests creating opportunities for democratic participation by all

stakeholders. I am also suggesting that the notion of being less democratic could resonate with thin democratic school practices. However, it is important to note that inevitably the principal is accountable to what I term significant others and these include: the department of education and the various stakeholders.

Green (1999, as cited by Johnson & Hess, 2010) states that the notion of thick democracy focuses on the characteristics and skills that are essential for individuals to become fully participatory members of their democratic society. As evident at both schools there was minimal learner participation at SGB meetings and in policy formulation. Carr (2008a) explains that the thick notion of democracy is concerned with power relations, identity and social change, whereas the thin interpretation essentially involves electoral processes, political parties, and structures related to formal democracy. Both schools had legitimate structures (SGB and RCL) that promoted representative democracy. Carr (2008b) associates representative democracy with thin democracy but Young (2000) cautions against assuming that representative democracy is incompatible with deep (thick) democracy. Furman and Shields (2003, as cited in Mulford, 2008) state that there is a need for schools to move from thin conceptions of democracy to a notion of deep democracy that is more participatory and inclusive. This would imply full and equal participation of learners in the running of the school.

It was evident that democratic schools are committed to democratic principles, and these schools appeared to be aligned to democratic principles. This view was aptly stated by the principal at Red Star Secondary School who posited that, “In a democratic school the various stakeholders subscribe to the principles of democracy”. I concluded without a doubt that the principals were to a large extent committed to democratic principles. The respondents at both schools believed that a democratic school is built on the vision and democratic principles of the Constitution. Moreover, adherence to democracy involves being committed to its principles (Genç, 2008; Kelly, 1995). Thus in creating democratic schools it is necessary to implement and reinforce the principles of democracy (Kelly, 1995; Kensler, 2010; Mncube & Harber, 2010).

Interestingly, the principals’ espoused notions of a democratic school were to a large

extent congruent with their actual practices. In addition, I found that ‘democratic school’ is a pregnant notion heavily loaded with ideas of a range of interrelated democratic principles. A democratic school like democracy itself is continuously growing and evolving, never perfect but with infinite potential. The preceding statement is aptly captured in the response by Red Star Secondary School principal: “I will not pretend to say that this school is totally democratic or it fulfills all the [democratic] principles. I see us evolving in that process”. Thus, moving a school towards becoming more democratic is a continuous, dynamic process rather than a static state that is achieved.

Bäckman and Trafford (2007) elaborate on the idea of democratic development in schools. They refer to four stages of democratic development. In stage one there is no trace of democratic activity; stage two represents initial attempts towards democratic values and practices; stage three involves further progression in democratic practices; and stage four is an advanced form of living. Viewed in this light, it can be concluded that at Red Star Secondary School the principal is striving to move his school to the ideal democratic state where democratic principles permeate every aspect of school life. Essentially democratic development of schools is a constant, ongoing process.

### **8.2.2 Role of the principal in a democratic school**

An important finding from the interviews was that at both schools all the participants felt that their principal practiced democracy. Even the principals themselves indicated that they practiced democracy in school. My observations and document review corroborated the finding that the principals at the case study schools were attempting to create, lead and govern their schools democratically. The respondents concurred and clearly articulated that the principal plays a pivotal role in promoting and practising democracy in the school.

Dimmock (1995) adds that principals can exercise significant influence on the extent to which their schools are democratic. Extending this line of thought are Bäckman and Trafford (2007, p. 6), who assert that without the active support of the principal “democracy is unlikely to take root and grow”. In essence the principal plays a fundamental role in orchestrating efforts to promote democracy in the school and the unequivocal support of the principal is essential. At the case study schools attempts to

democratize the schools were initiated to a large extent by the principals themselves, and they appeared to be committed to this course.

The aforementioned findings address research question two as to whether principals are attempting to create, lead and govern schools democratically. The findings that follow address research question three, as to how do principals create, lead and govern schools democratically?

The principals at the case study schools displayed strikingly similar characteristics. These common strands included commitment, openness, integrity, excellent communication and interpersonal skills, being good listeners and having faith in others. They also respected the rights and dignity of others. In addition, they were caring and supportive of others. They placed a high premium on personal values and their practices revolved around personal values like integrity, respect and caring for others. These aforementioned characteristics of the principals at both schools point towards servant leadership. Servant leadership is driven by the desire to serve, support team members, promote shared decision-making and caring behaviour, as well as empower and develop the potential of staff so that they can give of their best (Cunningham, 2008; Serrat, 2009; Spears, 2010). Other characteristics associated with servant leadership include listening and empathy (Spears, 2010). I also found that the principals' practices resonated with their notions of democratic schools and were linked directly to various democratic principles.

As mentioned the principal at Red Star Secondary School was striving to move his school to the ideal democratic state where democratic principles permeate every aspect of school life. The principals' practices of democracy at both of the case study schools revealed many similarities. These principals practiced sharing of ideas and sharing of expertise. They fostered a democratic culture that embraced the cultures of collegiality, respect, care and trust, listening and participation, communication, consultation and collaboration. In addition, it was evident that the practice of various democratic principles contributed towards developing a democratic culture in the case study schools.



Smit and Oosthuizen (2011) concur that a democratic culture will only develop through democratic practices. Both the principals at the case study schools aimed at promoting the Bill of Rights and even though they put into practice varied democratic principles, they acknowledged that they are ultimately accountable for the running of the school. The principals also had faith in the potential of others and therefore sought the skills and expertise of staff members. The two schools clearly illustrate how it is possible to achieve democratic practices in schools. It appeared as if these principals were instrumental in creating little democracies in their schools.

### **8.2.3 Processes and structures that make a school democratic**

Beane and Apple (1999) posit that democratic schools involve creating democratic structures and processes through which life in the school is carried out. Dimmock (1995) concurs that fundamental characteristics of democratic schools include appropriate decision-making structures, procedures and processes. Simply stated, in advancing democracy in schools it is necessary to have structures and processes in place. At both the schools participants made reference to collective decision-making, collaboration and voting as democratic processes. In fact the election of learners onto the RCL occurred through a structured voting process. From the responses at both schools the structures that make the school democratic included the staff representatives, site stewards representing the teacher unions, a fully elected RCL, SGB, SMT, peer mediators and learning (subject) area committees. The responses from both the learner and teacher representatives do not only provide insight into the functioning of the democratic structures in the schools but, most importantly, indicate that these individuals had an understanding of representative democracy. These learner and teacher representatives understood that they represented a larger constituency and as such they understood their role functions.

At Red Star Secondary School the principal was of the opinion that the learner committees are structures that contribute to democracy in the school, and he added that these learner committees are solely learner initiatives. I must point out that these learner committees, that included an environment committee, sports committee and a feeding scheme, were also common to Excell Secondary School. Although more can be done with regard to the inclusion of the learner voice in major decision-making, I was convinced that democratic participation at both schools was not reduced to

merely establishing formal decision-making structures such as the SMT, RCL and the SGB.

#### **8.2.4 Curriculum and teaching methods**

In a democratic school teaching and learning should be centred on a curriculum and teaching methods that are consistent with democracy (Mncube & Harber, 2010). However, parent representatives at both case study schools felt that they were probably not qualified to comment on the curriculum. Similarly, Van Wyk (2007) reported that parents believed that they have very little knowledge of curriculum issues and it is for this very reason they were reluctant to contribute to such matters. Participants at the case study schools affirmed that the curriculum is a common national one and they believed that it was preset, and that therefore nothing much could be done with it. From the responses I was able to conclude that at both schools there was an oversight with regard to Section 21 of the SASA, which clearly outlines that the SGB can “determine the extra-mural curriculum of the school and the choice of subject options in terms of provincial curriculum policy” (RSA, 1996b, p. 13).

Further, respondents’ felt that there was a need for a stakeholder voice in the curriculum. Affirming this line of thought are, among others, Noddings (1997), Bean and Apple (1999) and Mncube and Harber (2010), who believe that it is necessary for learners to contribute to the curriculum. A democratic curriculum aims at developing critical skills (Beane & Apple, 1999; Campbell, 1999) and is relevant to the lives and experiences of the learners (Wringe, 1984). Red Star Secondary School teacher 1, felt that it is necessary to link aspects in the curriculum to the real-life world so that it becomes meaningful to the learner. The teachers and learners at both schools believed that the school encourages freedom of expression and critical thinking. There were mixed responses with regard to the teaching strategies at these schools, and Excell Secondary School parent 1 maintained that, “There appears to be an element of critical thinking and ... regurgitation”. However, at both schools respondents referred to dialogue and discussion in the classrooms, and it can be concluded that the teachers are attempting to move towards learner-centred teaching with emphasis on interactive and participatory teaching and learning methods.

### **8.2.5 Shared leadership**

My findings revealed that there was a shift from the top-down notion of power and ideology of control as associated previously with the principal, to a unifying view of shared leadership. The principals seem to move away from stereotypical authoritarian behaviour and instead viewed leadership as a collective endeavour. In other words they promoted participative leadership. My observations and interview responses at both schools revealed that the principals were not afraid of letting go of power. Hence they viewed leadership as originating from others in the school community.

It was evident that at both of the case study schools the principals were to a large extent democratic as well as supportive in their roles. Both principals emphasized the centrality of listening and they also promoted critical thinking amongst stakeholders. Effective listening is a fundamental skill for critical thinkers, hence extending the notion of democratic leaders promoting active listening and critical thinking. The principals saw the need to develop the potential of others and thus involved individuals in running the school. At both schools the principals promoted shared leadership, collaboration and teamwork. In fact the notion of a very horizontal type of leadership seemed to be emerging. As mentioned above, the principals saw the need for others to be involved in the running of the school. This was aptly captured by Red Star Secondary School learner 1:

although he [the principal] is the face of our school there are so many people behind him that help to make the school what it is today, not only in his leadership but also in his decision-making, which is shared.  
(Red Star Secondary School learner)

Although the principals believed in shared decision-making, the teachers at both schools believed that there are occasions when unilateral decision-making is necessary. However, these may be exceptions rather than the rule. Furthermore, I found that leadership at these schools revolved around democratic principles like respect, collaboration, consultation and communication, participation and shared decision-making, transparency and openness. Hence it seemed that democratic principles were embedded in the principals' leadership practices.

Most importantly, at the case study schools the interconnectedness of individuals was emphasized. At Excell Secondary School two of the interviewees posited that the

principal fosters a spirit of Ubuntu. In essence the leadership at these schools was predominantly participative and both principals encouraged others to lead. However, with the principals' common belief that leadership can emanate from others in the school community, rather than leadership being an individual activity, I would argue that a distributed perspective of leadership seems to be emerging. Moreover, in encouraging teamwork these principals emphasized support and trust. Their belief in and practice of shared decision-making, listening to others and being empathetic, empowering and developing the potential of staff also suggests servant leadership.

### **8.2.6 Democratic school governance**

Apart from parent 1 at Excell Secondary School who claimed that the principal sometimes dominated the SGB meetings, at both schools the participants believed that governance in the school was shared. Elaborating on shared school governance, Singh (2006) argues that this requires leaders who are able to develop decision-making structures and processes that stimulate meaningful participation and collaboration. At both schools the principals ensured that there was a fully functioning SGB and promoted shared decision-making. However, there was a general feeling at the schools that more can be done with regard to the inclusion of learners in all decision-making. At both schools there were signs of a shift towards democratic school governance, as the principals seemed to embrace the notion of stakeholder partnership and stakeholder voice.

Mncube (2009a) appositely comments that democratic school governance implies that all the stakeholders, including parents, decide on school policies that affect the education of their children. Although the parent voice was heard, as mentioned earlier in this chapter greater effort is required with regard to incorporating the learner voice in policy development. My observations of the SGB meetings at both schools allowed me to conclude that these meetings were characterized by openness, respect and sharing of ideas specifically with regard to the teachers, parents and the principal. Singh (2006) in his study also found that at the core of shared school governance were virtues that included sharing, openness, trust and respect for others. I must point out that the emphasis of democratic principles within shared school governance is accentuated. Basically I am alluding to the embeddedness of democratic principles in shared school governance.

Similarly, Mncube (2007a, p. 106) affirms that democratically governed schools “honour participation, adequate representation, tolerance, deliberation and dialogue and rational discussion”. With regard to the stakeholders in the SGBs, at both schools they appeared to be working together, were adequately represented on the SGB as outlined in the SASA, and focused on a common interest which was the effective functioning of the school, thus suggesting a collective identity and a shared sense of belonging. In addition, the SGB meetings revealed a shift towards deliberation, dialogue and discussion, although this was to a greater extent between parents and teachers. Essentially there was a move towards democratic school governance.

### **8.3 Fundamental factors that support the further democratization of schools**

Democratic schools emphasize stakeholder voice within the notion of shared decision-making. Beane and Apple (1999) elaborate that in a democratic school all those involved in the school, including the learners, have the right to participate in the decision-making process. A fundamental factor that supported the further democratization of schools and was referred to by the respondents revolved around advancing shared decision-making. At both schools the principals believed it was essential to listen to and to consider the views of others. In the same vein, Davies et al. (2006) found that teacher-learner relationships improved when learners felt that they were listened to. From my observations and interview responses I found that the principals were able to relate to others in the school community. In fact the principals were trying to create positive, caring and respectful relationships with others in the school. Similarly, Steyn et al. (2004) contend that sound interpersonal relations are necessary for a democratic society, and as such democratic schools should nurture healthy personal relations.

In supporting the further democratization of schools the need to promote the rights of individuals is crucial. Respondents saw the need for a democratic curriculum with its emphasis on learner-centredness, critical thinking, and interactive and participatory teaching-learning methods.

### **8.4 Factors that constrain the further democratization of schools**

In creating a democratic school or transforming a school into a more democratic institution, there would be challenges. However, in the face of such challenges the

principals at the case study schools were still able to create democratic schools. At both schools there was a feeling that the process of collaboration and consultation is time-consuming. Woods and Gronn (2009, p. 437) concur that, “decisions may be delayed substantially and the direction of the organization rendered unclear by prolonged debates”. There was also a common feeling at the schools that there is a need for training of the SGB members so as to facilitate the process of democratic school governance.

At both schools the principals concurred that some individuals may still be stuck in past practices and ideologies that may work against democracy. In addition, participants at the schools referred to parent apathy. At Excell Secondary School the principal mentioned issues of power relations that hinder democratic practices, and reference was made to the influence of ideologies that teachers were indoctrinated with in the apartheid era. In addressing this challenge I refer to Harber and Serf (2006), who note that for schools to operate democratically, teachers need to learn ways of working democratically in both the whole school and the classroom. This would imply that democratic schools require new skills of teachers, and training is therefore essential (Frank & Huddleston, 2009). Finally, an interviewee at Red Star Secondary School raised concern about representation of individuals on the SGB and legitimately questioned if school governance was not in the hands of a few representatives. This concern was linked to parent apathy that worked against the notion of democracy.

Having presented a summary of my main findings, an outline of recommendations follows.

## **8.5 Recommendations**

From the findings of this study the recommendations are as follows:

- ❖ For a truly democratic curriculum learners should be involved in curriculum planning and in this study not one of the interviewees referred to learners being involved in curriculum planning. Instead there was a general view that the national curriculum is a prescribed one. Being an educator as well, I have yet to experience this kind of participation from learners in curriculum

development. Most importantly a democratic school requires a democratic curriculum. Thus there is a need to share power and authority with regard to all stakeholders planning the curriculum.

- ❖ At the case study schools interviewees referred to minimal learner participation at SGB meetings. Other studies (Mabovula, 2008 & 2009; Mncube & Harber, 2009) have revealed a similar finding. Hence there is a pressing need to focus on ways to enhance learner participation during SGB meetings. It is for this reason I feel that the training programmes for SGB members requires urgent attention and perhaps reviewing. It is essential for the DoE to spearhead training of all SGB members specifically in skills in deliberation. This training should not be once off but should be ongoing, and there should be a series of these sessions.
  
- ❖ Presently in South African schools citizenship education and human rights are incorporated in Life Orientation. However, I advocate for democratic citizenship education, inclusive of human rights education, as a separate learning area in South African primary and secondary schools. During this time democracy and its varied meanings, origins and models can be discussed. In addition, teachers should also be trained for citizenship education with emphasis on advancing democratic attitudes and skills with regard to the learners. At both the case study schools there were many senior teachers with more than 25 years teaching experience. These teachers were schooled and received their teacher training during the apartheid years, therefore some type of training in democratic citizenship education will assist them firstly in developing democratic attitudes and skills specifically with regard to the learners and secondly in reinforcing their own democratic practices. Furthermore, Harber (1997a; 2004) contends that democracy is not a characteristic that is inherited- instead it is behaviour that is learnt. In other words both the teachers and learners can benefit from citizenship education as citizenship education aims at equipping individuals with the skills and knowledge to function in a democratic society.

Focusing on citizenship education through the lenses of democratic leadership, teachers as democratic leaders within the classroom also need to promote various skills like "... the competence to participate in democratic communities, the ability to think critically and act deliberately in a pluralistic world, the empathy that permit us to hear and thus accommodate others" (Barber, 1992, as cited in Schoeman, 2006, p. 132). Citizenship education has the potential to strengthen these necessary skills and I posit that democratic leadership resonates with citizenship education within the classroom, the school and society. In short, leadership practices at all levels in the school should be compatible with the notion of democracy. Hence I am of the opinion that citizenship education would facilitate what Dobozy (2007, p. 117) refers to as "educating tomorrow's citizens in acquiring necessary attitudes and skills to function" in a democracy.

- ❖ As mentioned one of the findings of this research revealed that more could be done to include learners in all decision-making. In response to this finding I maintain that learners should also be provided with time to discuss democracy in their schools. In support of this argument, Collinson and Cook (2007) as well as Ekholm (2004) concur that time needs to be set aside for learners and teachers to discuss democracy in their schools. Perhaps through discussions stakeholders can understand the need to be viewed as equals with regard to decision-making. Jenlink and Jenlink (2008) intimate that what makes a school democratic is bound, in part, by a common purpose, which is democracy.

My recommendations also include aspects for future research.

### **8.6 Recommendations for further research**

Emanating from the research findings are recommendations and possibilities for future research.

- ❖ This study highlighted the centrality of democratic principles with regard to democratic schools. Future research studies on democratic schooling should



be directed towards exploring the correlation between schools that practice democratic principles and learner achievement.

- ❖ Various authors (Carr, 2008b; Dewey, 1916; Harber, 2004; Aspin, 1995; Kelly, 1995; Apple & Beane, 2007) refer to the correlation between education and democracy. In other words it has been argued that democratic schools produce democratic citizens. Hence there is a need for longitudinal studies focusing specifically on the correlation between education and democracy.
- ❖ Voice is an essential feature of democratic schooling. International scholars (Holmes, 2006; Davies & Kirkpatrick, 2000) have emphasized a correlation between learner participation (in terms of learner voice) and learner attainment. However, in South Africa there is a need for a longitudinal study focusing specifically on learner participation in school decision-making and learner attainment.
- ❖ This study focused on two schools in an urban area. Non-teaching staff (for example the school secretaries and cleaners) was not included. Furthermore, the secondary schools in the area from which the sample schools were selected did not have female secondary school principals. Future studies should look at various factors like increasing the sample size, including female school principals, schools from rural areas and responses from the non-teaching staff.
- ❖ In democratic schools the learners' voice is crucial. This study found minimal learner participation at SGB meetings. In-depth studies to document specifically the views and experiences of learners on the SGB are necessary. The sample should include schools from varying socio-economic backgrounds.
- ❖ This study focused on secondary school principals in democratic schools. According to SASA 84 of 1996 schools with Grade 8 classes and higher are required to establish a council of learners elected by the learners, which in effect is a representative structure for learners known as the RCL. Essentially

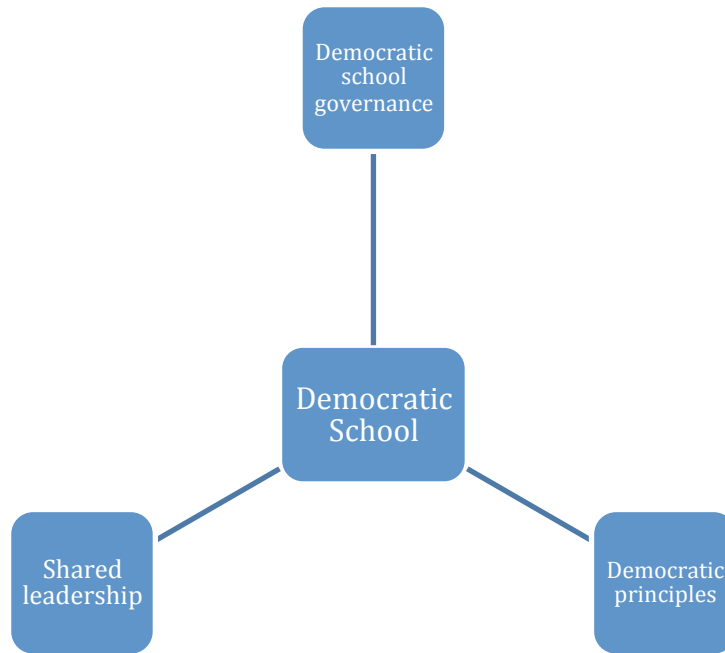
the RCL and SGB as legitimate, democratic structures provide space for learner voice. It would be interesting to look at primary schools that generally cater for grade R to grade 7 learners and the principals' experiences and practices in creating democratic schools.

### **8.7 Towards a model for creating a democratic school**

The furtherance of South Africa's democracy is influenced largely by what goes on in schools currently. Schools need to promote and nurture a democratic way of life. I am aware that schools differ with regard to various factors, some of which include leadership styles, ethos, resources and vision. Simply stated, each school has its own dynamics and democratic schools as a phenomenon are dynamic. It is for these very reasons that I feel there can be no blueprint to establishing a democratic way of life in schools. With this in mind and in light of the findings from the lived reality of the participants, I offer a comprehensive, coherent theoretical account as to how principals can create, lead and govern democratic schools.

At this juncture I am reminded that democracy does not just happen, rather it is created through experiences shared by all individuals of a community (Jenlink & Jenlink, 2008). Similarly, democratic schools require deliberate attempts to live democracy in schools. In addition, schools should continually strive to become more democratic since a democratic school is not a static state that is realized. O'Hair et al. (2000, pp. 49-50) aptly explain that, "No matter what our schools are like, our responsibility ... is to help them become more democratic". However, like democracy, the notion of democratic schools is an ideal that has to be pursued. Essentially democratization of a school should not suggest culmination with regard to transformation. Instead the focus should extend to deepening democracy in the school.

I posit that democratic schools are founded on a triad made up of democratic principles, shared leadership and democratic school governance. This notion is represented in Figure 8.1 that aptly captures the three fundamental components in a democratic school.



*Figure 8.1:* The three fundamental components in a democratic school.

It is important to point out that although in Figure 8.1 I have illustrated the three fundamental components as distinct features, they are not isolated; instead they are closely connected and together contribute towards a democratic school. Thus democratic principles, shared leadership and democratic school governance are interdependent features of democratic schools. Moreover, these three features fuel both the notion and practice of democracy within democratic schools.

There are several democratic principles, and these are interrelated. This interrelatedness of the various democratic principles is aptly captured in Figure 8.2. In addition I posit that a dynamic interrelationship exists between democratic principles, shared leadership and democratic school governance. At this juncture I emphasize that democratic principles are enmeshed in the notions of shared leadership and democratic school governance, as illustrated in Figure 8.3. In articulating this idea I refer to the embeddedness of democratic principles in shared leadership and democratic school governance. Thus creating, leading and governing democratic schools revolve around democratic principles, shared leadership and democratic school governance.

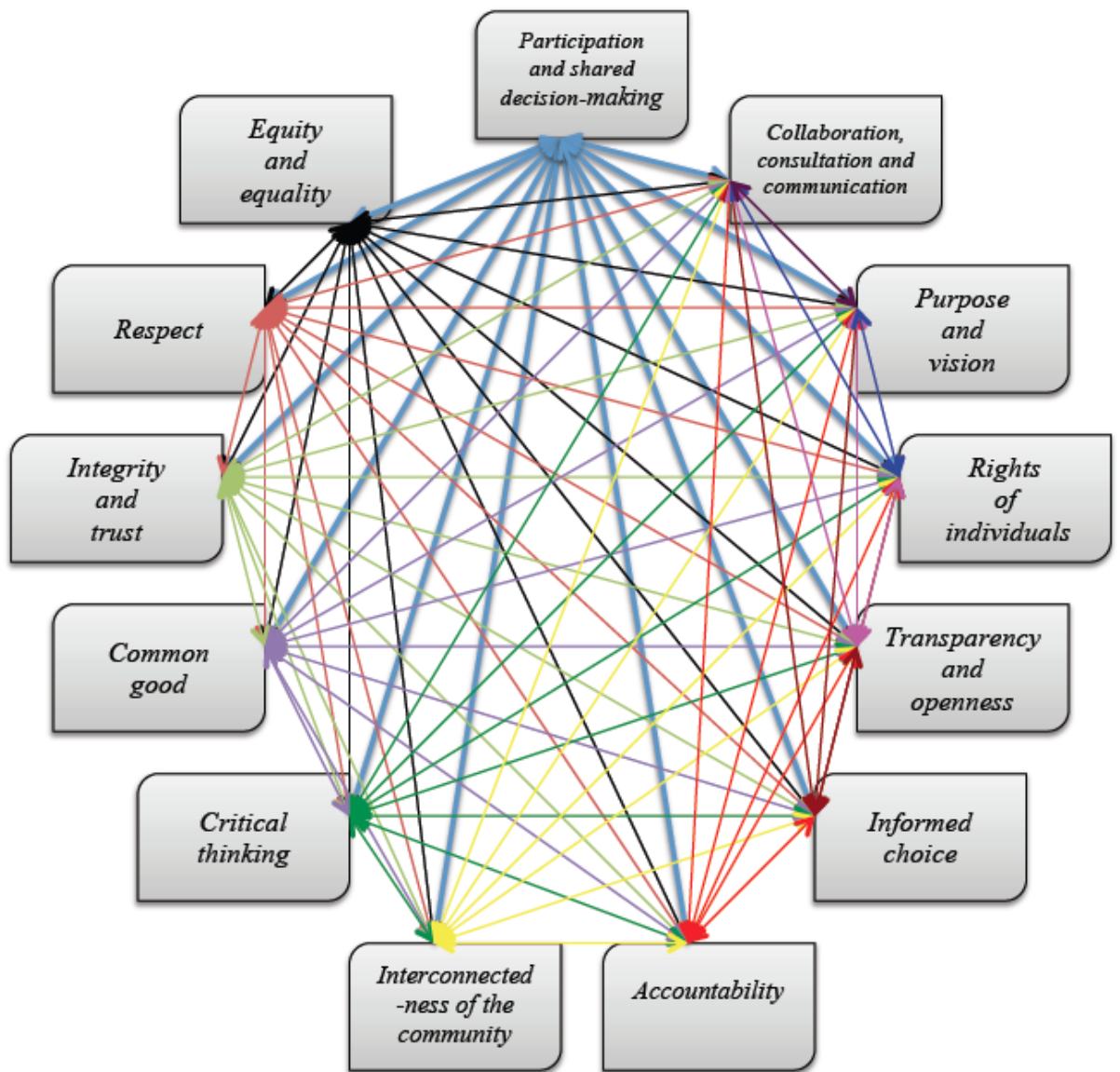
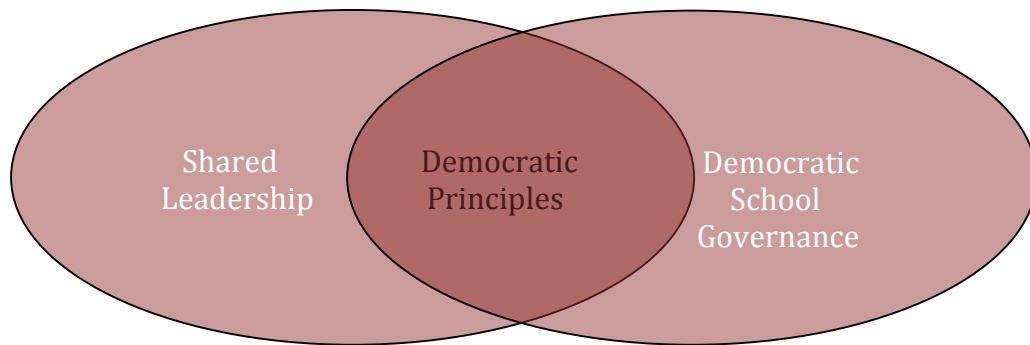


Figure 8.2: The interrelatedness of democratic principles



*Figure 8.3:* The embeddedness of democratic principles in shared leadership and democratic school governance.

Needless to say, with regard to the democratic principles there exists extensive interplay. Although an exhaustive list of democratic principles exists, some of these (that were discussed in Chapter Three) include purpose and vision, collaboration, consultation and communication, participation and shared decision-making, accountability, transparency and openness, informed choice, rights of individuals, integrity and trust, critical thinking, common good, interconnectedness of the community, respect and equality and equity. I must point out that in creating democratic schools it is necessary to infuse democratic principles in the daily school activities such that they become a way of life or, simply stated, a democratic culture.

In creating a democratic school it is necessary for democratic practices to permeate every aspect of school life. This implies that democratic practices should not only be confined to the classroom. Furthermore, democratic schools require a whole-school approach, and attempts to democratize a school or move a school to become more democratic cannot succeed without the efforts of all stakeholders. This will include the parents, teachers, learners and non-teaching staff. It follows that creating a democratic school requires all stakeholders to have a common understanding of the notion ‘democratic school’. There is also a need for a shared vision and common purpose that contributes to collective identity and collective responsibility.

Democratic schools are founded on democratic principles. Thus in creating democratic schools it is necessary to implement and reinforce the principles of

democracy as they guide a democratic way of life. Succinctly this implies that schools need to live out democratic principles. Democratic principles should permeate every aspect of school life such that it becomes a way of life. Essentially democratic principles contribute towards creating a democratic environment. Thus the school culture should reflect democratic practices that are underpinned by democratic principles. In other words, democratic principles are central to a democratic culture. Contributing to a democratic way of life in schools are democratic structures and democratic processes. These structures include the RCL, SGB, SMT, peer mediators and learning area committees. I must point out that it is necessary for a school to ensure that it has a fully constituted SGB. With regard to democratic processes, decision-making can involve practices like consensus and collective decision-making, collaboration and voting.

Democratic schools require a democratic curriculum, and all relevant stakeholders - particularly the parents, learners and teachers - should be involved in the development of the curriculum. The curriculum should be relevant to the lives of the learners (Wringe, 1984; Beane & Apple, 1999) encouraging learners to become “critical readers” of society (Beane & Apple, 1999, p. 15). Democratic classrooms are the hubs of democratic schools where learners are “treated as reciprocal constructors of knowledge” (Bryan & Hayes, 2010, p. 66). In democratic classrooms democratic practices are promoted, each learner’s voice is equally important, and his or her views are equally respected (Barr, 2007). Teaching and learning in democratic schools is to a large extent learner-centred with emphasis on participatory interactive teaching and learning methods.

With regard to leadership in democratic schools, the emphasis is on shared leadership, and democratic schools should also promote the idea that leadership can emerge from anyone in the school community. Although democratic leadership is “consistent with the democratic way of life” (Antonio, 2008, p. 43), I do not prescribe a particular leadership style but rather suggest that there is a need for our schools to continue to evolve into more democratic institutions; thus our focus should shift to the democratic distributed perspective of leadership. A distributed perspective advances the idea of collective leadership (Harris, 2005b) and openness with regard to the boundaries of leadership (Woods et al., 2004). Thus democratic distributed leadership acknowledges

“that leadership is fluid and can emerge from anywhere within a school community” (Youngs, 2007, p. 4). Moreover, a “democratic view of distributed leadership goes beyond consulting students and parents in decision-making processes to assisting them develop their own leadership voice” (Youngs, 2007, p. 6).

Finally, democratic schools embrace the idea of democratic school governance. This notion of shared school governance emphasizes stakeholder participation and stakeholder voice. More specifically, I must add that the inclusion of the learner voice is essential, and with this in mind the democratic distributed perspective of leadership embraces the idea of learner voice and, more especially, assisting the learners to develop their own leadership voice.

Having provided a theoretical account as to how principals can create, lead and govern democratic schools, I reiterate that democratic schools are dynamic. With this in mind I refer to Dewey (1937, as cited in Jenlink, 2009, p. 293) who asserts that, “The very idea of democracy, the meaning of democracy, must be continually explored afresh; it has to be constantly discovered, and rediscovered, remade and reorganized”. In short, democracy is not fixed and neither is it a perfect state that can be attained. Instead it is an ideal that people can work towards. Similarly, democratic schools that are founded on democratic principles will continually evolve and therefore need to be persistently explored. However, I must point out that democratic schools involve creating schools that are organized, governed and practiced as democracies. Furthermore, there is a need for democratic schools to emphasize a notion of deep democracy that is more participatory and inclusive (Furman & Shields, 2003, as cited in Mulford, 2008). Deep democracy is consistent with Green’s (1999, as cited in Johnson & Hess, 2010) thick notion of democracy, which focuses on the characteristics and skills that are essential for individuals to become fully participatory members of their democratic society.

## **8.8 Conclusion**

My study has led me to conclude that the notion of a democratic school is workable, achievable and sustainable. Although the principal is instrumental in creating a democratic school, a whole-school approach to practising democracy is necessary. Furthermore, democratic schools should not be just an abstract notion but a notion

that is brought to life through practice. Although the notion of a democratic school is an ideal, we need to continually move towards this ideal. Therefore I believe that democratic schooling is work in progress. In emphasizing the embeddedness of democratic principles in shared leadership and democratic school governance as well as presenting a model for creating a democratic school, this study can contribute to the growing body of literature on democratic schools.

As I bring this chapter as well as this study to a close, I emphasize that democratic schools are necessary if South Africans are to deepen and sustain a democracy that people fought long and hard for. This argument resonates with Barber's (1993, p. 5) assertion that, "The logic of democracy begins with public education" and as such I militantly maintain that democratic schools have the potential to deepen our understanding and practice of democracy. Hence I concur with Noddings (2011, p. 5) that there is a need "to create schools that will serve as incubators of democracy".

Having argued in Chapter One that democratic schools will contribute immensely to democratic societies and ultimately the building of a democratic nation, I conclude this study remaining committed to this cause, but with renewed enthusiasm and fervent passion. Finally, we are reminded that, "Democracy is not a goal, it is a path; it is not attainment, but a process... When we grasp this and begin to live democracy, then only shall we have democracy" (Follett, 1918, as cited in Bäckman & Trafford, 2007, p. 101).



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## ***APPENDICES***

### ***APPENDIX A: Letter to KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education***

114 Braeside Avenue  
Bellair  
4094

23 March 2010

The Director: Research Strategy Development and Emis  
KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education  
Private Bag X9137  
Pietermaritzburg  
3200

Sir/Madam

#### **Re: Permission to Conduct Academic Research**

I am pursuing a Doctor of Philosophy (Education) degree at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. The prerequisite of this degree is a full thesis, which requires a research study. The focus of my research is democratic schools and the title of my thesis is 'Experiences and practices of school principals in creating, leading and governing democratic schools'. The primary aim of this study is to provide insight into ways in which principals create, lead and govern democratic schools. This study is part of a research project that is funded by the National Research Foundation. My supervisor who is spearheading this project is Dr Vusumuzi S Mncube (031 2607590). He is a senior lecturer and discipline head for education and professional studies at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. It is my intention that the information obtained from this research be made available to the Department of Education.

I hereby request permission to conduct the aforementioned research study at the following three schools in Isipingo, Durban this year during the second term. These schools are Isipingo Secondary School, Orient Hill School and Strelitzia Secondary School. From my discussion with the principals they have indicated that their schools are to a large extent democratic. Thus these schools have been selected through purposive sampling as they have characteristics of democratic schools as revealed in literature on democratic schools. The invaluable assistance of the principals is required to complete the research and permission will be obtained from them. The principals who participate in this study will do so voluntarily. These participants will be interviewed. At each school one-on-one interviews will also be conducted with 3 teachers, 3 parents and 3 learners. The duration of the interviews will be approximately 40 minutes.

I will observe each principal, with his or her consent, over a period of two weeks. I will also observe governing body meetings, staff briefing and staff meeting sessions at each school. With permission from the principals I will review some of the official school documents. These will include discipline records, letters to parents, minutes of staff meetings and school governing body meetings. The interviews will be audio-

recorded and will be disposed of after completion of the study. Participation is voluntary and the participants are free to withdraw at any point in the study. With regard to the learners, permission to participate will be sought from their parents. When conducting the research I will ensure that normal functioning of the school is not in any way disrupted. To ensure confidentiality the names of the participants and the schools will not be revealed. Confidentiality and privacy will be maintained at all times. Furthermore the data obtained will be used only for the purpose of this study.

Your kind assistance in this matter will be appreciated. I have included my contact details.

Yours faithfully  
R. Naidoo

Tel: 031 4654663 (H)                      031 9023633 (W)  
      0842083821 (Cell)                  Fax: 031 9023620  
Email: [ren@primarymath.net](mailto:ren@primarymath.net)

**APPENDIX B: Informed consent - Letter to the principal**

114 Braeside Avenue  
Bellair  
4094

13 July 2010

The Principal

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Sir

**Re: Permission to Conduct Academic Research**

I am pursuing a Doctor of Philosophy (Education) degree at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. The prerequisite of this degree is a full thesis, which requires a research study. The focus of my research is democratic schools and the title of my thesis is 'Experiences and practices of school principals in creating, leading and governing democratic schools'. The primary aim of this study is to provide insight into ways in which principals create, lead and govern democratic institutions. My supervisor is Dr Vusumuzi S Mncube (031 2607590), a senior lecturer and discipline coordinator for education and professional studies at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. The information obtained from this research will be made available to you.

I hereby request permission to conduct the aforementioned research study at your school. In our previous discussion you had indicated that your school is to a large extent democratic. Thus your school has been selected through purposive sampling as it has characteristics of democratic schools. Your invaluable assistance is required to complete the research. You will each be interviewed twice. The duration of the interviews will be approximately 40 minutes. The interviews with your permission will be audio-recorded. You will be observed over a period of two weeks and I will also observe governing body meetings and staff meetings. With your permission I will review some of the official school documents. These will include discipline records, letters to parents, minutes of staff meetings and school governing body meetings. In addition I will conduct one-on-one interviews with 3 teachers, 3 parents and 3 learners. To facilitate the flow of the interviews these sessions will be audio-recorded and will be disposed of (incinerated) after completion of the study.

Participation is voluntary and you are free to withdraw at any point in the study. There will be no pain or discomfort involved in your participation. There is also no risk to your safety. Furthermore a decision not to participate will not result in any form of disadvantage. Although you may not benefit directly, you will be exposed to

democratic practices in schools. When conducting the research I will ensure that normal functioning of the school is not in any way disrupted. To ensure anonymity your name will not be revealed. Confidentiality and privacy will be maintained at all times. Although you will remain anonymous your perceptions and experiences form a vital part of the study and will be used accordingly.

Your willingness to participate in this study is greatly appreciated. Your participation will without doubt contribute significantly to the aforementioned research. I have provided my contact details should you require further information regarding this study.

Yours faithfully

R. Naidoo

Tel: 031 4654663 (H)                      031 9023633 (W)  
      0842083821 (Cell)                    Fax: 031 9023620  
Email: ren@primarymath.net

.....

**Declaration by participant.**

I \_\_\_\_\_ (full name and surname) hereby confirm that I understand the contents of this document and the nature of the research project and I consent to participating in the research project.

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

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

P.S. To provide you, the participant, the opportunity to read, understand and question the information given before you provide consent, I (the researcher – Renuka Naidoo) will collect this document on \_\_\_\_\_.

## **APPENDIX C: Informed consent - Letter to the teacher**

114 Braeside Avenue  
Bellair  
4094

13 July 2010

Dear Sir/Madam

### **Re: Informed Consent**

I am pursuing a Doctor of Philosophy (Education) degree at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. The prerequisite of this degree is a full thesis, which requires a research study. The focus of my research is democratic schools and the title of my thesis is 'Experiences and practices of school principals in creating, leading and governing democratic schools'. The primary aim of this study is to provide insight into ways in which principals create, lead and govern democratic schools. This study is part of a research project that is funded by the National Research Foundation. My supervisor who is spearheading this project is Dr Vusumuzi S Mncube (031 2607590). He is a senior lecturer and discipline coordinator for education and professional studies at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. The information obtained from this research will be made available to you.

My study will involve conducting interviews with teachers. Thus you will be required to participate in interviews to gain insight into your notions of democracy and your related experiences of democracy in school. The duration of each interview will be approximately 40 minutes. To facilitate the flow of the interviews these sessions will be audio-recorded and the data files will be deleted on completion of the study. Participation is voluntary and you are free to withdraw consent and discontinue participation at any point in the study. There will be no pain or discomfort involved in your participation. There is also no risk to your safety. Furthermore a decision not to participate will not result in any form of disadvantage. The interview will be conducted outside teaching and learning time. To ensure anonymity your name will not be revealed. Confidentiality and privacy will be maintained at all times. Although you will remain anonymous your responses form a vital part of the study and will be used accordingly.

Your willingness to participate in this study is greatly appreciated. Your participation will without doubt contribute significantly to the aforementioned research. I have provided my contact details should you require further information regarding this study.

Yours faithfully

R. Naidoo

Tel: 031 4654663 (H)  
0842083821 (Cell)

031 9023633 (W)  
Fax: 031 9023620

Email: ren@primarymath.net

**Declaration by participant.**

I \_\_\_\_\_ (full name and surname) hereby confirm that I understand the contents of this document and the nature of the research project and I consent to participating in the research project.

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

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

P.S. To provide you, the participant, the opportunity to read, understand and question the information given before you provide consent, I (the researcher – Renuka Naidoo) will collect this document on \_\_\_\_\_.



**APPENDIX D: Informed consent - Letter to the parent**

114 Braeside Avenue  
Bellair  
4094

13 July 2010

Dear Sir/Madam

**Re: Informed Consent**

I am pursuing a Doctor of Philosophy (Education) degree at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. The prerequisite of this degree is a full thesis, which requires a research study. The focus of my research is democratic schools and the title of my thesis is 'Experiences and practices of school principals in creating, leading and governing democratic schools'. The primary aim of this study is to provide insight into ways in which principals create, lead and govern democratic schools. This study is part of a research project that is funded by the National Research Foundation. My supervisor who is spearheading this project is Dr Vusumuzi S Mncube (031 2607590). He is a senior lecturer and discipline coordinator for education and professional studies at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. The information obtained from this research will be made available to you.

My study will involve conducting interviews with parents. Thus you will be required to participate in interviews to gain insight into your notions of democracy and your related experiences of democracy in school. The duration of each interview will be approximately 40 minutes. To facilitate the flow of the interviews these sessions will be audio-recorded and the data files will be deleted on completion of the study. Participation is voluntary and you are free to withdraw consent and discontinue participation at any point in the study. There will be no pain or discomfort involved in your participation. There is also no risk to your safety. Furthermore a decision not to participate will not result in any form of disadvantage. The interview will be conducted outside teaching and learning time. To ensure anonymity your name will not be revealed. Confidentiality and privacy will be maintained at all times. Although you will remain anonymous your responses form a vital part of the study and will be used accordingly.

Your willingness to participate in this study is greatly appreciated. Your participation will without doubt contribute significantly to the aforementioned research. I have provided my contact details should you require further information regarding this study.

Yours faithfully

R. Naidoo

Tel: 031 4654663 (H)  
0842083821 (Cell)

031 9023633 (W)  
Fax: 031 9023620

Email: [ren@primarymath.net](mailto:ren@primarymath.net)

**Declaration by participant.**

I \_\_\_\_\_ (full name and surname) hereby confirm that I understand the contents of this document and the nature of the research project and I consent to participating in the research project.

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

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

P.S. To provide you, the participant, the opportunity to read, understand and question the information given before you provide consent, I (the researcher – Renuka Naidoo) will collect this document on \_\_\_\_\_.

**APPENDIX E: Informed consent - Letter to the learner**

114 Braeside Avenue  
Bellair  
4094

13 July 2010

Dear Sir/Madam

**Re: Informed Consent**

I am pursuing a Doctor of Philosophy (Education) degree at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. The prerequisite of this degree is a full thesis, which requires a research study. The focus of my research is democratic schools and the title of my thesis is 'Experiences and practices of school principals in creating, leading and governing democratic schools'. The primary aim of this study is to provide insight into ways in which principals create, lead and govern democratic schools. This study is part of a research project that is funded by the National Research Foundation. My supervisor who is spearheading this project is Dr Vusumuzi S Mncube (031 2607590). He is a senior lecturer and discipline coordinator for education and professional studies at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. The information obtained from this research will be made available to you.

My study will involve conducting interviews with learners. Thus you will be required to participate in interviews to gain insight into your notions of democracy and your related experiences of democracy in school. The duration of each interview will be approximately 40 minutes. To facilitate the flow of the interviews these sessions will be audio-recorded and the data files will be deleted on completion of the study. Participation is voluntary and you are free to withdraw consent and discontinue participation at any point in the study. There will be no pain or discomfort involved in your participation. There is also no risk to your safety. Furthermore a decision not to participate will not result in any form of disadvantage. The interview will be conducted outside teaching and learning time. To ensure anonymity your name will not be revealed. Confidentiality and privacy will be maintained at all times. Although you will remain anonymous your responses form a vital part of the study and will be used accordingly.

Your willingness to participate in this study is greatly appreciated. Your participation will without doubt contribute significantly to the aforementioned research. I have provided my contact details should you require further information regarding this study.

Yours faithfully

R. Naidoo

Tel: 031 4654663 (H)  
0842083821 (Cell)

031 9023633 (W)  
Fax: 031 9023620

Email: [ren@primarymath.net](mailto:ren@primarymath.net)

**Declaration by participant.**

I \_\_\_\_\_ (full name and surname) hereby confirm that I understand the contents of this document and the nature of the research project and I consent to participating in the research project.

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

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

P.S. To provide you, the participant, the opportunity to read, understand and question the information given before you provide consent, I (the researcher – Renuka Naidoo) will collect this document on \_\_\_\_\_.

**APPENDIX F: Informed consent - Letter to the parent regarding participation by the learner**

114 Braeside Avenue  
Bellair  
4094

13 July 2010

Dear Parent

**Re:** Informed consent

I am pursuing a Doctor of Philosophy (Education) degree at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. The prerequisite of this degree is a full thesis that requires a research study. The focus of my research is democratic schools and the title of my thesis is 'Experiences and practices of school principals in creating, leading and governing democratic schools'. The primary aim of this study is to provide insight into ways in which principals create, lead and govern democratic schools. This study is part of a research project funded by the National Research Foundation and my supervisor is Dr Vusumuzi S Mncube (031 2607590). Permission has been obtained from the KwaZulu-Natal Education Department to conduct this study.

My study will involve conducting interviews with learners. Thus your child will be required to participate in interviews to gain insight into his/her notions of democracy and his/her related experiences of democracy in school. The duration of each interview session will be approximately 40 minutes. To facilitate the flow of the interviews the sessions will be audio-recorded and the data files will be deleted on completion of the study. Participation is voluntary and should you decide to grant permission for your child to participate you are free to withdraw consent and discontinue his/her participation at any point in the study. There will be no pain or discomfort involved in your child's participation. There is also no risk to his/her safety. Furthermore, a decision not to allow your child to participate will not result in any form of disadvantage. The interview will be conducted outside teaching and learning time. To ensure anonymity the name of the participant will not be revealed. Confidentiality and privacy will be maintained at all times. Although the learner will remain anonymous his/her responses form a vital part of the study and will be used accordingly.

Your willingness to allow your child to participate in this study is greatly appreciated. Your child's participation will without doubt contribute significantly to the aforementioned research. I have provided my contact details should you require further information regarding this study.

Yours faithfully

R. Naidoo

Tel: 031 4654663 (H)  
0842083821 (Cell)

031 9023633 (W)  
Fax: 031 9023620

Email: [ren@primarymath.net](mailto:ren@primarymath.net)

**Declaration by participant.**

I \_\_\_\_\_ (full name and surname of parent) hereby confirm that I understand the contents of this document and the nature of the research project and I consent to my child, \_\_\_\_\_ (full name and surname) participating in the research project.

I understand that I am at liberty to withdraw my child's participation from the project at any time, should I so desire.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

P.S. To provide you, the parent, the opportunity to read, understand and question the information given before you provide consent, I (the researcher – Renuka Naidoo) will collect this document on \_\_\_\_\_.

## ***APPENDIX G: Interview schedule for principals***

### **The questions that I will ask the principal include:**

1. What is your understanding of making a school democratic?
- 2.1 Do you think you practice democracy in your school?
- 2.2 If so, how do you (the principal) practice democracy in your school?
3. What processes have you put (will you put) in place to make your school democratic?
4. What structures are in place, if any, to make your school democratic?
5. What is your view of the role of the principal in making a school democratic?
6. How do you create a democratic school?
7. Please explain how democratic principles are integrated into your school curriculum.
8. Please explain how the teaching methods utilized in your school are consistent with democracy.
9. What is your role in leading a democratic school?
10. Explain your role in school governance.
11. What are some of the challenges you experience in moving your school to become more democratic?

## ***APPENDIX H: Interview schedule for the teachers, parents and learners***

### **The questions that I will ask include:**

1. What is your understanding of making a school democratic?
- 2.1 Do you think your principal practices democracy in your school?
- 2.2 If so, how does he/she practice democracy in your school?
3. What processes are in place or should be in place to make your school democratic?
4. What structures are in place, if any, to make your school democratic?
5. What is your view of the role of the principal in making a school democratic?
6. Describe how your principal is creating a democratic school.
7. Please explain how democratic principles are integrated into your school curriculum.
8. Please explain how the teaching methods utilized in your school are consistent with democracy.
9. Explain the principal's leadership role.
10. What role does your principal play in shared school governance?
11. In your opinion what are some of the challenges experienced by the principal in moving your school to become more democratic?



## ***APPENDIX I: Observation schedule for principals***

**This observation schedule is aimed at assisting me during my observation of the principal.**

**When observing the principal, I will take extensive notes that will focus on the following:**

- What was said
- The details of who was speaking
- How long the discussion took
- The speaking turns
- The principal's interaction with the staff (authentic, supportive or even compassionate?).

Further, I will observe the following:

- Prevalence of issues of democracy in interactions with others (freedom of expression, shared decision-making, agreed-upon goals and respect for others. Are the learner, staff and parent voice equally valued? Is there evidence of shared leadership?)
- Participation with learners
- The principal's leadership style (e.g. predominantly authoritarian or *laissez faire* etc.)
- The atmosphere that prevailed during interaction with others (e.g. tense, relaxed, etc.)
- Is there an illusion of democracy or are the opinions/decisions of others considered?

## ***APPENDIX J: Observation schedule for SGB meetings***

**This observation schedule is aimed at assisting me during my observation of formal SGB meetings.**

**When observing the SGB meeting, I will take extensive notes that will focus on the following:**

- What was said
- The details of who was speaking
- How long the discussion took
- The seating plan of the members in the meeting
- The speaking turns
- Contribution by each member of the SGB
- The role of the principal in the meeting

Further, I will observe the following:

- Participation by each stakeholder member
- Representation of stakeholders in such meetings
- Prevalence of issues of democracy in such meetings (Freedom of expression, shared decision-making, agreed-upon goals and respect for others. Are the learner, staff and parent voice equally valued? Is there evidence of shared leadership?)
- Participation by learners (Were learners treated with dignity and encouraged to participate in discussions?)
- The principal's leadership style (e.g. predominantly authoritarian or *laissez faire*, etc.)
- The atmosphere that prevailed during interaction with others (e.g. tense, relaxed, etc.)
- Is there an illusion of democracy or are the opinions/decisions of others considered?
- Did the meeting address issues on the agenda?

I will focus on the prevalence of democracy (e.g. shared decision-making, agreed-upon goals, respect for others, equal value of all individuals, etc.

**APPENDIX K: Observation schedule for school staff meeting/ staff briefing sessions**

**This observation schedule is aimed at assisting me during my observation of formal school staff meeting/ staff briefing sessions.**

**When observing the meeting, I will take extensive notes that will focus on the following:**

- The seating arrangement of the staff (management members and level one educators)
- Contribution by staff members. (What was said?)
- Did the meeting start on time?
- The duration of the meeting
- Interaction with teachers (Were teachers treated with dignity and encouraged to participate in discussions?)
- The role of the principal in the meeting
- The atmosphere that prevailed (e.g. tense, relaxed, etc.)
- Did the meeting address issues on the agenda?
- The principal's leadership style (e.g. predominantly authoritarian or *laissez faire*, etc.)
- Is there an illusion of democracy or are the opinions/decisions of others considered and even to be implemented?

I will focus on the prevalence of democracy (e.g. shared decision-making, agreed upon goals, respect for others, equal value of all individuals, etc.).

**APPENDIX L: Ethical clearance from the Humanities and Social Sciences  
Research Ethics Committee**



University of KwaZulu-Natal  
Research Office, Govan Mbeki Centre  
Westville Campus  
Private Bag x54001  
DURBAN  
4000  
Tel No: +27 31 260 3587  
Fax No: +27 31 260 4609  
sshrec@ukzn.ac.za

25 JUNE 2010

**MRS. R NAIDOO (204515984)  
SCHOOL OF EDUCATION**

Dear Mrs. Naidoo

**PROTOCOL REFERENCE NUMBER: HSS/0443/010D**

**PROJECT TITLE: Experiences and practices of school principals in creating, leading and governing democratic schools**

In response to your application dated 21 June 2010, the Humanities & Social Sciences Ethics Committee has considered the abovementioned application and the protocol has been given **FULL APPROVAL**.

Any alteration/s to the approved research protocol i.e. Questionnaire/Interview Schedule, Informed Consent Form, Title of the Project, Location of the Study, Research Approach and Methods must be reviewed and approved through the amendment /modification prior to its implementation. In case you have further queries, please quote the above reference number.

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

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

Yours faithfully

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

cc. Supervisor- Dr. Vusumuzi S Mncube  
cc. Ms. T Khumalo

## APPENDIX M: Letters of approval from KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education



kzn education

Department:  
Education  
KWAZULU-NATAL

**MRS R NAIDOO**  
**114 BRAESIDE AVENUE**  
**BELLAIR**  
**4094**

Enquiries: Sibusiso Alwar

Date: 23/04/2010

Reference: 0032/2010

### RESEARCH PROPOSAL: EXPERIENCES AND PRACTICES OF SCHOOL PRINCIPALS IN CREATING, LEADING AND GOVERNING DEMOCRATIC SCHOOLS

Your application to conduct the above-mentioned research in schools in the attached list has been approved subject to the following conditions:

1. Principals, educators and learners are under no obligation to assist you in your investigation.
2. Principals, educators, learners and schools should not be identifiable in any way from the results of the investigation.
3. You make all the arrangements concerning your investigation.
4. Educator programmes are not to be interrupted.
5. The investigation is to be conducted from 23 April 2010 to 23 April 2011.
6. Should you wish to extend the period of your survey at the school(s) please contact [Mr Sibusiso Alwar](#) at the contact numbers above.
7. A photocopy of this letter is submitted to the principal of the school where the intended research is to be conducted.
8. Your research will be limited to the schools submitted.
9. A brief summary of the content, findings and recommendations is provided to the Director: Resource Planning.

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

KWAZULU-NATAL DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

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

PHYSICAL: Office G25, 188 Pietermaritz Street, Metropolitan Building, PIETERMARITZBURG 3201

TEL: Tel: +27 33 341 8610/8611 | Fax: +27 33 341 8612 | E-mail: [sibusiso.alwar@kzndoe.gov.za](mailto:sibusiso.alwar@kzndoe.gov.za) / [smiso.sikhakhane@kzndoe.gov.za](mailto:smiso.sikhakhane@kzndoe.gov.za)



**kzn education**

Department:  
Education  
KWAZULU-NATAL

10. The Department receives a copy of the completed report/dissertation/thesis addressed to:

The Director: Resource Planning  
Private Bag X9137  
Pietermaritzburg  
3200

We wish you success in your research.

Kind regards

**R. Cassius Lubisi (PhD)**  
**Superintendent-General**

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

KWAZULU-NATAL DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

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

PHYSICAL: Office G25; 188 Pietermaritz Street; Metropolitan Building; PIETERMARITZBURG 3201

TEL: Tel: +27 33 341 8610/8611 | Fax: +27 33 341 8612 | E-mail: [sibusiso.atwar@kzndoe.gov.za](mailto:sibusiso.atwar@kzndoe.gov.za) / [smiso.sikhakhane@kzndoe.gov.za](mailto:smiso.sikhakhane@kzndoe.gov.za)



**kzn education**

Department:  
Education  
KWAZULU-NATAL

**MRS R NAIDOO  
114 BRAESIDE AVENUE  
BELLAIR  
4094**

Enquiries: Sibusiso Alwar

Date: 23/04/2010

Reference: 0032/2010

**LIST OF SCHOOLS**

1. XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX
2. XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX
3. XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX

Kind regard

**R Cassius Lubisi, (PhD)  
Superintendent-General**

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

**KWAZULU-NATAL DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION**

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

PHYSICAL: Office G25, 188 Pietermaritz Street, Metropolitan Building; PIETERMARITZBURG 3201

TEL: Tel: +27 33 341 8610/8611 | Fax: +27 33 341 8612 | E-mail: [sibusiso.alwar@kzndoe.gov.za](mailto:sibusiso.alwar@kzndoe.gov.za) / [smiso.sikhakhane@kzndoe.gov.za](mailto:smiso.sikhakhane@kzndoe.gov.za)



kzn education

Department:  
Education  
KWAZULU-NATAL

**MRS R NAIDOO**  
**114 BRAESIDE AVENUE**  
**BELLAIR**  
**4094**

Enquiries: Sibusiso Alwar

Date: 23/04/2010

Reference: 0032/2010

## PERMISSION TO INTERVIEW LEARNERS AND EDUCATORS

The above matter refers.

Permission is hereby granted to interview Departmental Officials, learners and educators in selected schools of the Province of KwaZulu-Natal subject to the following conditions:

1. You make all the arrangements concerning your interviews.
2. Educators' programmes are not interrupted.
3. Interviews are not conducted during the time of writing examinations in schools.
4. Learners, educators and schools are not identifiable in any way from the results of the interviews.
5. Your interviews are limited only to targeted schools.
6. A brief summary of the interview content, findings and recommendations is provided to my office.
7. A copy of this letter is submitted to District Managers and principals of schools where the intended interviews are to be conducted.

The KZN Department of education fully supports your commitment to research: **Experiences and practices of school principals in creating, leading and governing democratic schools**

It is hoped that you will find the above in order.

Best Wishes

**R Cassius Lubisi, (PhD)**  
**Superintendent-General**

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

KWAZULU-NATAL DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

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

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**kzn education**

Department:  
Education  
KWAZULU-NATAL

Enquiries: Sibusiso Alwar

Tel: 033 341 8610

Ref.:0032/2010

Ms Renuka Naidoo

**EXTENTION OF RESEARCH PERIOD:  
PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN THE KZN D&E INSTITUTIONS**

1. Your application for the extension of the period for collecting data in the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education Institutions has been approved.
2. The research period has been extended to the 31 December 2013.
3. Please note that only the period has been extended, the other conditions stipulated in the original approval still hold. Therefore this letter must always be presented with the original approval.
4. Hope you find this in order.



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

**KWAZULU-NATAL DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION**

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

**APPENDIX N: Letter from editor**

**L. Gething, M. Phil. (Science & Technology Journalism) (*cum laude*)**

[WHIZZ@WORDS](mailto:WHIZZ@WORDS)

Private Bag X1008, Hillcrest 3650 South Africa; tel/fax 031 769 1435; cell 072 212 5417

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**DECLARATION OF EDITING OF PhD THESIS by  
Renuka Naidoo**

Experiences and Practices of School Principals in Creating, Leading  
and Governing Democratic Schools

18 November 2011

I hereby declare that I carried out language editing of the following PhD thesis by Ms Naidoo - Experiences and Practices of School Principals in Creating, Leading and Governing Democratic Schools.

I am a professional writer and editor with many years of experience (e.g. 5 years on *SA Medical Journal*, 10 years at the SA Medical Research Council, including working with Prof. Malegapuru Makgoba), who specialises in Science and Technology editing - but am adept at editing in many different subject areas. I am a member of both the South African Freelancers' Association and the Professional Editors' Group. I complete many editing projects at the request of both Prof. Bhana, Dr Maistry and others at UKZN.

Yours sincerely

**LEVERNE GETHING**

[leverne@eject.co.za](mailto:leverne@eject.co.za)

**APPENDIX O: Originality report**

**Experiences and Practices of School Principals in Creating, Leading and Governing Democratic Schools**

ORIGINALITY REPORT

<b>7%</b>	<b>5%</b>	<b>3%</b>	<b>1%</b>
SIMILARITY INDEX	INTERNET SOURCES	PUBLICATIONS	STUDENT PAPERS

PRIMARY SOURCES

<b>1</b>	Submitted to University of KwaZulu-Natal <i>Student Paper</i>	<b>&lt; 1%</b>
<b>2</b>	Mncube, V.. "Chronicling educator practices and experiences in the contex.. <i>Publication</i>	<b>&lt; 1%</b>
<b>3</b>	eprints.ru.ac.za <i>Internet Source</i>	<b>&lt; 1%</b>
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<b>10</b>	Patrick Jenlink. "Creating Democratic Learning Communities: Transformative.. <i>Publication</i>	<b>&lt; 1%</b>
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<b>12</b>	Submitted to Walden University <i>Student Paper</i>	<b>&lt; 1%</b>
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