The dynamics of leading in rural contexts: Narratives of primary school principals

by

Zamokwakhe Thandinkosi Ncokwana

Student Number: 212558677

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University of KwaZulu-Natal

Supervisor: Professor Inbanathan Naicker

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DECLARATION

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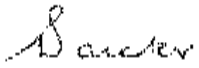
Signature: 

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“Mama, Geli Priscina MaMnyandu Ncokwana, if it weren’t for your resilience, perseverance and vision, I would not have gone this far in life. Even after ubaba passed on, you remained standing and resolute in ensuring that my siblings and I remained at school like all other children in the village. This PhD is a special dedication to you to say, the unbearable working conditions you had to contend with as a domestic worker and the scorching hot sun you had to endure working in the sugarcane plantations to put a plate of food on the table for us has not been in vain.”

Ngibonga ngiyanconcoza Mama

ABSTRACT

The South African public education system, is a two-tiered education system, comprising the poor schools and the least poor schools. The former are ranked quintiles 1, 2 and 3 while the latter are ranked quintile 4 and 5. Quintile 1 schools, in the main, are found in rural locales. Quintiles 4 and 5 are mainly located in urban areas. Primary schools located in rural contexts contend with a myriad of challenges including poverty, unemployment, constrained resource and poor infrastructural capacities aggravated by their geographic landscape. While contending with these adversities, they are expected to perform at a similar level as their counterparts in urban contexts. Given these challenges, these schools are expected to be dysfunctional and perform poorly. However, there are pockets of schools which are functional and able to perform at more or less the same level as schools in other contexts. This study explores the lived experiences of school principals leading primary schools in rural contexts. The study sought to narratively understand the dynamics of leading in rural contexts. It is positioned within the interpretivist paradigm. Methodologically, the study employed narrative inquiry. Four primary school principals leading in rural context were purposively selected in the Ilembe District. Life story interviews, artefact inquiry and collage inquiry were used to generate field texts (data). Research texts were thematically analysed. The key findings of the study revealed that the leadership practices of school principals are influenced by who they are which is characterised by multiple identities. Therefore, who they are prescribes how they think and what they do. The school principals draw on their personal and professional meanings and understandings of selves to inform the leadership practices that they enact. The school principals' personal and professional selves draw from each other in the process of constructing meanings and understandings. The interplay between leadership and rural context shapes and reshapes the school principals' leadership practices. To this end, leadership practices are context-laden. Clearly, leadership discourse can no longer relegate context to the peripheral ranks. The study generated a model of leadership called Cross-cutting and Multi-agency Leadership (CML).

Keywords: leadership, rural context, narratives, meanings and understandings of selves, dynamics

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS/ACRONYMS

ANC	Africa National Congress
BA	Bachelor of Arts
BLL	Bureau for Language and Literacy
CML	Cross-cutting and Multi-agency Leadership
DH	Departmental Head
DP	Deputy Principal
EEA	Employment of Educators Act
Fincom	Finance Committee
FTSS	Full-Time Shop Steward
HDE	Higher Diploma in Education
HOD	Head of Department
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
IQMS	Integrated Quality Management System
NAEP	National Assessment of Educational Progress
NATU	National Professional Teachers' Union
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
PhD	Doctor of Philosophy
PPM	Post Provisioning Model
PPN	Post Provisioning Norm
REAP	Rural Education Achievement Programme
RTT	Race To the Top
SADTU	South African Democratic Teachers' Union
SASA	South African Schools Act

SA-SAMS	South African Schools Administration and Management System
SDT	Staff Development Team
SGB	School Governing Body
SIG	School Improvement Grant
SIT	Social Identity Theory
SLT	Servant Leadership Theory
SMT	School Management Team
TR	Theory of Rurality
TTB	Thongathi Town Board
USA	United States of America

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CHAPTER ONE

PAINTING THE RESEARCH LANDSCAPE: ORIENTATION AND BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

1.1 Introduction

In this chapter I paint the landscape of this study which examines the dynamics of leading in rural contexts through the narratives of lived experiences of primary school principals. I commence by presenting the background to the study and the research problem. This is followed by the justifications for undertaking this study. These justifications are threefold, namely: personal, practical and social. Thereafter, I present the objectives of the study and the research puzzles (critical questions) that drive the study. Next, I clarify key concepts used in this study. Lastly, I outline how the study is organised in terms of chapters.

1.2 Background to the study

Education in rural contexts is not on par and aligned with educational developments in different contexts in South Africa (Ramnarain & Hlatshwayo, 2018). Consequently, South African communities located in rural contexts still have to grapple with a number of challenges including education of their children in such contexts (Moletsane, 2012). This suggests that some schools located in rural contexts are inclined to progressively perform under par. Such state of affairs adversely affects more than half of South Africa's learner population that reside in rural locales (Department of Basic Education, 2010). However, this does not necessarily translate into rural contexts being essentialised by homogeneity (Roberts & Green, 2013). There are rural contexts actualities that are similar to those that play out in urban locales. Thus, each rural context may have its own strains of uniqueness, setting it apart from the next rural context. These context disparities in which the school principals enact their leadership have resulted to scholarship that promotes context-embedded programmes to prepare and develop school principals for their leadership terrains (Eacott & Asuga, 2014; Hallinger, 2018). This suggests that if school principals are not specifically prepared to lead in rural contexts, the execution of their leadership mandates becomes a "sink or swim" trajectory. Further, schools function in the midst of varying context intricacies therefore, how school principals lead their schools in rural contexts becomes a manifestation of constant interplay and negotiation between such intricacies and their leadership (Miller, 2018). How the leadership terrain *vis-à-vis* the context terrain are navigated may determine effectiveness or ineffectiveness of a school.

The disparities regarding the academic performance of learners in rural and urban contexts have highlighted the plight of the underprivileged contexts in the developing world (Hallinger & Liu, 2016) including Africa. In South Africa, the public schooling system consists of two school worlds: the sufficiently or abundantly resourced schools and the disadvantaged, poorly resourced schools (Chikoko, Naicker & Mthiyane, 2015; Mestry, 2014; Republic of South Africa, 2006). The Department of Basic Education clearly acknowledges the prevalence of these two school worlds through the categorisation of public schools into no fee schools and fee paying schools (Republic of South Africa, 2006). These categorisations, no fee and fee paying schools, are ranked from quintile one to five based on their socioeconomic status (Engelbrecht, 2008; Motala, 2015). The former, which are poor schools, are ranked as quintiles 1, 2 and 3 while the latter, which are the least poor schools, are ranked as quintiles 4 and 5 (Mestry, 2018; Republic of South Africa, 2006). Being the poor, no fee schools, quintile one to three receive higher state funding than their counterparts in quintile four and five (Booysen, Wijesiri, Ripunda & Goonetilleke, 2019). Therefore, no fee or fee free schools are not allowed to charge compulsory school fees while fee paying schools are allowed to levy school fees in addition to receiving comparatively lower state funding (Motala & Carel, 2019). For the no fee schools their main source of revenue is state funding. These quintile one, two and three schools are those that contend with constrained infrastructural capacity, fiscal and physical resource capacities and are found in spaces with poor socioeconomic statuses (Mestry, 2018) which in the main include rural contexts.

Though this no fee and fee paying school funding policy has made significant contributions to alleviating the plight of poor schools as per quintile ranking, it is argued that inequities and inequalities are still perpetual (Motala & Carel, 2019). In resonance with this argument, still after the advent of the democratic dispensation in South Africa in 1994, the quality of public education and the academic performance of learners in schools in rural contexts has not exhibited much enhancement (du Plessis & Mestry, 2019; Smit, 2017). Schools located in rural areas may still lag far behind in terms of learner performance and educational standards. This means even with the redistribution of state funds in favour of poor schools, the academic performance trajectories have not been transformed to reflect this school funding milestone (Motala & Carel, 2019). The pro-poor school funding policy has not as yet yielded the desired results and schools may still contend with some similar adversities prevalent before the introduction of this funding model.

Some adversities which rural communities are faced with are aggravated by deficit-based epistemologies about rural education and development in South Africa. Therefore, South Africa needs to relocate research on rurality and rural development from deficit-based to asset-based research discourse on rurality (Moletsane, 2012). Such deficit narratives entrench the status quo on rural education and impede exploitation of possibilities and strengths of rural communities. It is to this end that it is argued that teachers in rural contexts have the capacity to turn around the schools in the face of, amongst others, resource constraints they contend with, including school principals (Brookfield, 2015; Engelbrecht, 2013; Makoelle, 2014; Mphahlele, 2017; Themane & Thobejane, 2019; Woodcock & Hardy, 2017). This argument highlights the notion that even in the face of rurality there may be capacities and strengths that may drive transformation of the school. Moreover, school principals who are successful do not only craft an assortment of central practices which are perceived to be correlated to the success of schools, but they also tweak and align how they respond to their contexts and culture within which their leadership is enacted (Gurr, 2014). This suggests that context is a critical role-player in the development of leadership practices. As a result, context cannot be ignored if schools are to make inroads in enhancing their effectiveness and riding success trajectories.

Like her counterparts around the globe, rural Africa and principals leading schools in rural contexts also contend with a multitude of adversities however, there is paucity of research-based suggestions regarding how these principals can tackle their unique actualities in rural contexts (Hardwick-Franco, 2019). This suggests that how the school principals in rural contexts deal with their day to day realities is different to the way their counterparts in urban contexts deal with theirs. Contemporary trends in research indicate that leading schools in rural contexts requires customised considerations (Preston & Barnes, 2017). This emphasises that leadership practices that school principals develop need to be consistent with the rural contexts in which their schools are located and the local needs (Hallinger, 2016). It is to this end that it was found that school principals leading in rural contexts need professional learning that is tailor-made for such contexts and that such learning is co-constructed with them (Hardwick-Franco, 2019). Being at the coalface of rurality actualities, school principals understand the dynamics of their leadership plight better than an outsider's perspectives.

In a bid to turn around their schools, principals in rural Zimbabwe consider their context embedded realities in order to understand what enables and what disables their leadership. Nonetheless, school principals need to devise innovative strategies of effectively managing and

negotiating the interchange between enablers and disablers (Moyo & Perumal, 2019). It is an assortment of strengths which can serve as enablers to school principals in the face of alleviating poverty, amongst others. This is seen to be fundamental to the school principals' responsibilities in the developing world including Africa (Maringe & Sing, 2019). Therefore, the principals' understanding of the intricacies of their school contexts and turnaround trajectories, including school culture, are critical as reflected in teachers' behaviours, attitudes and their responses to varying school issues (Hallinger, 2016). By merely describing what the school principals in rural contexts need to change in their schools or giving them a manual that recounts successful leadership practices from the developed world, for example, is most unlikely to accomplish the anticipated ends without understanding their actualities first (Liu & Hallinger, 2018). The point of departure in building the leadership capacity of rural primary school principals is being conversant with these principals' day to day reality. If education districts that are situated in rural contexts are marginalised, structured professional learning in that context may be compromised or inadequate thereby leaving school principals to their own devices in terms of crafting their own leadership practices (Sofo & Abonyi, 2018). Consequently, relegating the rural education districts to the periphery may breed a cadre of school principals that feel alienated and unsupported; a state of affairs that may ultimately impact adversely on their performance.

1.3 The statement of the problem

South African rural communities, like in many developing and some developed countries, remain disadvantaged compared to their counterparts in urban areas (Hlalele, 2014). Schools that are located in poverty-stricken areas including rural areas are declared no fee schools (Motala, Dieltiens & Sayed, 2009). The rural primary schools face a myriad of unique challenges affecting principals' leadership and school performance. These challenges include, *inter alia*, poverty, unemployment, lack or unavailability of resources (human, physical, financial and material), lack of infrastructure compounded by geographical isolation of these schools.

In the face of these debilitating challenges, the principals of rural schools are still expected to perform like their urban counterparts. In practice, some of these rural schools either perform poorly or are expected to perform poorly given the adversities they contend with. However, a few of these rural schools are able to perform at levels comparable to some high achieving urban schools. This resonates with Chikoko, Naicker and Mthiyane (2015) who concur with

Badenhorst and Koalepe (2014) in stating that a few multiply deprived schools such as those in rural contexts are able to rise above their challenges and produce academic results that are comparatively on par with their advantaged counterparts. It appears there has been limited research on principals leading schools in rural contexts and their unique realities (Preston, Jakubiec & Kooymans, 2013) which suggests the existence of limited scholarship on the leadership of rural schools, particularly primary schools, regarding what the principals' leadership practices are. However, the focus of this study is not on successful primary schools. It explores leadership of primary schools in rural contexts.

Though there is emerging scholarship on leadership of schools in multiple deprived contexts including rural areas, such scholarship remains limited in South Africa (Maringe, 2015; Myende, 2018). This suggests that the shift regarding the landscape of leadership contexts in the developing world like South Africa has generally been unheeded as a framework for re-imagining and re-configuring leadership that is responsive to such contexts, rural in particular (Maringe & Sing, 2019). South Africa also needs to contribute and tap into these shifting discourses for the benefit of rural education. As succinctly stated by Nkambule, Balfour, Pillay & Moletsane (2011) that historically, rurality and rural education have been marginalised scholarship in South Africa; with Chikoko, Naicker and Mthiyane (2015) accentuating that South Africa needs "home-grown insights" on schools that are comparatively effective despite multiple deprivation. Moreover, there is noteworthy paucity of scholarship on primary schools (Costelloe, Mintz & Lee, 2020); particularly leadership of these schools in rural contexts. Hence, the focus of this study is to examine the dynamics of leading primary schools in rural contexts. The purpose of the study is to narratively explore the identities of principals leading in rural contexts, meanings and understandings that they draw on in their leadership and what influences their leadership practices.

1.4 Rationale for the study

My study is a narrative inquiry. Narrative inquirers need to provide three justifications for their studies, namely: the significance of the study to the inquirer as an individual (personal), the potential contribution of the study in practice (practical) and the difference the study may make to theoretical understandings (social) (Clandinin, 2013).

1.4.1 Personal Justification

I was born in a farm where my parents worked and lived. My parents earned meagre wages. To supplement my parents' income, my older siblings also had to work on the farm. I never went to crèche or pre-school as they never existed in the area where I lived. I completed my primary and early secondary education (now grades 8 to 10) in the schools in my area. I had to walk an average of 30 to 40 kilometres to and from school. From first year (now grade 1) to standard 5 (now grade 7), I did not have school shoes until standard 5 since it was compulsory to wear long grey pants and shoes. Aggravating our plight was that my father could not work since he was sick. Relocating to another rural locale, my mother worked at the sugarcane plantations and later as a domestic worker. During school holidays my siblings and I also worked in the sugarcane plantations to earn money to buy school uniform and other school items. We also planted vegetables at home. After school and during weekends, I had to move from door to door selling our produce. In 1982 my father passed on. My mother remained the only breadwinner.

At the community school, we were taught by some unqualified teachers and there was a dire shortage of teachers, particularly for Mathematics and Science. The entire standard eight class of 1985 failed Mathematics which shattered my aspirations of becoming a medical doctor. Contending with these realities, during that year I applied for a bursary because I wanted to enrol at a boarding school for my standard 9 and 10 (now grades 11 and 12). I was granted a bursary and I was able to enrol at a rural boarding school in northern KwaZulu-Natal, but I was not allowed to choose Maths and Science based on my standard 8 results. After matric I could not register at a tertiary institution due to financial constraints. During the course of the year I was employed as an unqualified teacher at my previous rural school where I completed standard 8. The following year I registered at a college of education where I qualified as a teacher. My mother used *ilobolo* (loosely translated as bride price) money for my elder sister to pay for my registration fees. Fortunately, I received a Department of Education and Culture bursary and other bursaries that I applied for which sustained me until I completed my diploma. During the course of my final year, I was granted a German scholarship to study towards a degree at the erstwhile University of Natal. However, later I was forced to decline this scholarship since in the same year my mother was retrenched. Therefore, I had to start working the following year in order to support my family. I was the first at home to have a qualification. I started working at a rural school in northern KwaZulu-Natal. Even after this setback (being

forced to decline scholarship), I still aspired to obtain a degree and ultimately a Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) one day.

Given all the above realities, as a child who was born and raised in rural areas and who attended rural schools, this means I was at the coalface of the challenges of rurality and particularly the schools located in those contexts. This triggered my desire to work in rural communities in a bid to alleviate their plight, irrespective of the career path I chose. Consequently, at a later stage, as a qualified teacher, I consciously chose to start teaching in rural schools. My early life experiences, including being taught by under- and unqualified teachers, shortage of teachers in the rural area, lack of resources and poor quality of education, in particular, have driven my commitment to the school's mandate of delivering quality public education. Later on, such a commitment underpinned my leadership as a Head of Department (HOD) in a rural school wherein I prioritized professional development of teachers and quality assurance of teaching and learning. I began to appreciate the day-to-day experiences of the principals leading schools in rural contexts. Having been profoundly influenced by these realities as a learner, as a teacher and during my tenure as HOD, I was motivated to explore the leadership narratives of school principals in rural contexts.

1.4.2 Practical Justification

I was a Head of Department (HOD) in Humanities (now called Departmental Head (DH)) at a rural school for eight years. Though I was not the school principal, being a School Management Team (SMT) member I was better placed to observe the realities the school principal has to contend with on a day-to-day basis. I was the only HOD in the entire school. In terms of the curriculum, this school also offered science and commercial streams. The principal would, from time to time, delegate some of his duties to me and ask me to attend some principals' meetings on his behalf. The school did not have a library and a science laboratory and neither did it have electricity and running water. Chief amongst the challenges that the principal faced was the inadequacy of resources (human, physical, material and financial). It was unaffordable for the school to buy textbooks for every registered learner, therefore learners had to share textbooks. Between 1997 and 2004, there were times when we did not have full complement of the staff, particularly Maths and Science teachers. During that period the school did not have any state-paid support staff and could not afford School Governing Body-paid support or academic staff. Therefore, the school principal had to perform some administrative duties which compromised his focus on leading teaching and learning processes. The curriculum

needs of the school forced the principal to also have classes to teach which exacerbated his overload. There was a shortage of floor space which was mirrored by overcrowded classes.

Furthermore, the culture of non-payment of school fees was rife which limited the capacity of the school to alleviate the resources challenge using its own generated revenue. Mitigating these challenges, the principal ensured that the limited resources that the school had were utilised efficiently and effectively. Leading from the front, the principal encouraged the entire school community to improvise in order to enhance the learning experiences of our learners. Amongst others, science learners were taken to advantaged schools for science experiments to be conducted. We organised Saturday and winter classes for our learners and brought on board some teachers from the community. The principal also kept the school photocopier at his house since there was no electricity and security at the school. Despite all these realities, the school was able to improve matriculation results from 30 percent in 1997 to 76 percent in 2004. My observations and experiences as a teacher and an SMT member made me realise how important it is to understand who these school principals are and to understand their lived experiences of leading the schools in rural, multiple deprived contexts, hence this study.

1.4.3 Social Justification

As chief accounting officers in schools, whether rural or urban, the school principals need to lead all facets of school life including, *inter alia*, school finances, resource allocation, academic programmes or teaching and learning processes. It therefore becomes critical that we understand their day to day, context-embedded lived experiences of leading their schools, particularly in rural contexts. This makes sound educational sense since compared to their urban counterparts, school principals in rural areas are faced with a unique set of realities (Preston, Jakubiec & Kooymans, 2013). This suggests that the realities of different rural areas are not homogenous, hence the principals' leadership narratives and realities of schools located in different or same rural areas are also not homogenous. According to Nkambule, Balfour, Pillay and Moletsane (2011), rurality and rural education have been marginalised bodies of knowledge in South Africa. Resonating with this view of Nkambule et al. (2011), Preston, Jakubiec and Kooymans (2013) are of the view that research that targets rural principals and their unique needs and circumstances is limited. This suggests that there is scarcity of scholarly research which deals with the leadership realities of, particularly primary school principals in rural contexts. Consequently, the lived experiences of principals leading primary schools in rural contexts is an under-researched phenomenon in South Africa and in other contexts.

Studies that have been conducted regarding the realities of schooling in rural areas have dealt with different issues around this phenomenon. A corpus of literature that exists mainly focuses on the challenges facing rural education and school principals (Compion, Steyn, Wolhuter & van der Walt, 2012; Howley, Rhodes & Beall, 2009; Preston, Jakubiec & Kooymans, 2013; Stelmach, 2011). Some of the studies deal with improving rural education and academic performance in rural schools (Redding & Walberg, 2012; Bhengu & Myende, 2015; Myende, 2015). Another set of scholarship has its foci on the professional development of teachers serving schools in rural areas (Mpahla & Okeke, 2015; Mukeredzi, 2016a; Mukeredzi, 2016b). There is also a body of scholarship dealing with the methodological challenges prevalent in the research terrain of rural education (Moletsane, 2012; Roberts & Green, 2013). I have not as yet come across scholarship that specifically focuses on the leadership narratives of primary school principals in rural contexts and how such contexts influence how these schools are led. Promoting leadership policies, practices and programmes, stakeholders in education need to have understandings of the unique realities encountered by the principals leading schools in rural areas (Preston, Jakubiec & Kooymans, 2013). To this end, this study seeks to address the gaps and break the silence regarding empirical knowledge intending to provide understandings of principals' lived leadership narratives of leading primary schools in rural contexts.

1.5 Research puzzles (Critical questions)

The main research puzzle is:
What are the lived experiences of principals leading primary schools in rural contexts?

This will be addressed by the following sub-puzzles:

a) Who are the principals leading primary schools in rural contexts?

b) What meanings and understandings do the principals draw on in their leadership of rural primary schools?

c) What are the day-to-day leadership practices of these principals of rural primary schools?

1.6 Clarification of key terms used in the study

The following key terms used in this study are clarified in this section: narratives, leadership, rural context and dynamics and rural school.

1.6.1 Narratives are viewed as stories (Polkinghorne, 1988) which are embedded in particular socio-historical contexts (Bold, 2012). Stories are central to human experience and existence, affording humans the opportunity to share their experiences in their individual timelines and they help to define the self and one's personal identity (Bold, 2012). Bolton (2006) views narratives as the people's way of making sense of and organising, retelling and reconstructing their experiences in the process of understanding their own stories and those of other people. Therefore, the study of narratives becomes the study of how people experience their world (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). However, narratives or stories are not based on verbal communication only, they include gesture, body language, visual images and different media effects (non-verbal communication) (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Reissman, 2008). Narratives therefore, are a way through which people make sense of their experiences and those of others.

1.6.2 Leadership involves persuading and encouraging people within an organisation to strive towards achieving a common set of goals or educational objectives that represent the vision and mission of the organisation (Burns, 1998). This means that leaders motivate people in the organisation to do what they would otherwise not do in the absence of influence. In this vein, Wasserberg (2000) claims that the fundamental role of any leader is to rally people within the organisation around the key organisational values hence Cuban (1988) links leadership with change. Given the above, DePree (1990) asserts that the signs of outstanding leadership appear primarily among the followers. Leadership need to influence people to utilise their potential, skills and knowledge to achieve the required results. Bush (2007) acknowledges that although there is an overlap between leadership and management, these two functions need to be placed on equal footing if schools are to fulfil their mandates effectively. Management involves a set of activities that effectively and efficiently maintain the current systems of the organisation with the intention of achieving organisational goals (Cuban, 1988) hence Bolam (1999) defines it as "an executive function for carrying out agreed policy" (p.194). Although leadership and management are distinct concepts, in practice, such a distinction may be blurred in the day-to-day leadership practices of school principals.

1.6.3 Rural context: Conceptualising rurality is challenging (Roberts & Green, 2013) hence there are diverse definitions of rurality. Chikoko (2008) posits that rurality is a multifaceted concept which needs to be understood within a particular context. Consequently, Myende (2015) is of the view that rurality is conceptualised differently by different people in different

contexts. Against this backdrop, in the South African context Myende and Chikoko (2014) state that a rural area may be understood to be any geographical area that is under the leadership of traditional leaders. The rural context therefore, refers to the sum total of the prevalent internal and external factors affecting (positively or adversely) the life of the participant schools in the areas under the leadership of traditional leaders (Noman, Hashim & Abdullah, 2016). This does not suggest that such factors are homogenous and neither is the intensity of their impact the same. These factors include, *inter alia*, the size of the community, the density of the population, proximity to urbanised centres, types of economic activities, educational levels, average household income, commuting patterns, access to services and facilities and in/out-migration trends (Coladarci, 2007). Notwithstanding, providing a rich description of context in any instance of rural education research does not translate into a consensual definition of rural context but it accentuates the rationale for providing adequate information about the context within which the research was conducted (Coladarci, 2007). To this end, how rural context is defined may vary from one study to another.

1.6.4 Dynamics: According to the Macmillan English Dictionary (2007), dynamics refers to a set of forces that exist in a situation, especially a relationship, and that affects how it changes or develops. The dynamics of a system are the forces that trigger that system to change or progress (Collins English Dictionary, 2018). These sets of forces may be internal or external changes (Jappinen, 2017). Forces that schools progressively contend with are challenging socioeconomic, political, cultural, technological changes (Beabout, 2012; Fullan, 2016; Hallinger & Heck, 2011). In this study, dynamics refer to the sum total of forces, enabling and disabling, prevalent within and beyond the bounds of the school which constantly affect how leadership is enacted, and how it constantly changes and develops over time. Consequently, being able to understand what underlies the dynamics of leadership may enable schools to act in response to actualities arising owing to internal and external forces (Jappinen, 2017). In essence, leadership dynamics find their expression in the interactions within and outside a system (school) in a particular context (rural). To this end, dynamics may serve as inhibitors or catalytic agents of leadership for change and development.

1.6.5 Rural school: A rural school refers to any school that is located within the jurisdiction of *Amakhosi* (traditional leadership) in the KwaZulu-Natal Province, South Africa (Bhengu & Myende, 2015).

1.7 Outline of chapters

In this section I present the chapter outline of this study.

Chapter One

This chapter paints the landscape of this study. The chapter commences with the background to the study and the research problem. Thereafter, it presents the justifications of the study and research objectives and research puzzles. The chapter also defines the key operational concepts and concludes with the outline of chapters.

Chapter Two

Chapter Two presents a review of related literature with regard to the dynamics of leading primary schools in rural contexts. The chapter explores the recurring debates regarding the phenomenon under study. Recurring debates in the existing scholarship include the following: leadership practices and contexts, shifting discourses on deficit approach to understanding rurality, contextual adversities facing rural schools, successful schools despite challenging contexts, landscape of education policies, promoting learning in rural schools.

Chapter Three

This chapter focuses on the theoretical underpinnings of the study. The chapter discusses three theories that constitute the theoretical framework. These theories are servant leadership theory, social identity theory and theory of rurality. The chapter starts by discussing what each theory entails and how it links to the study. Lastly, it presents the assemblage of these theories as a theoretical framework and why such framework is fit for purpose.

Chapter Four

This chapter presents the methodological choices and justifications of such choices. The chapter begins by declaring the approach and the interpretivist paradigm within which this study is located. It proceeds to discuss narrative inquiry methodology. Thereafter, the chapter

presents the research methods employed in this study which include sampling, generation of field texts (data) and analysis of field texts. Bringing this chapter to a close are trustworthiness issues and ethical considerations.

Chapter Five

This chapter focuses on narrative analysis. In this first level of analysis, the narrative accounts of participants (field texts) are configured into research texts. This configuration process is about re-storying the narratives of participants so that they become a meaningful whole. This chapter responds to the first research sub-puzzle which focuses on the identities of school principals as individuals and as professionals.

Chapter Six

Chapter Six presents analysis of narratives. This second level of analysis addresses the second research sub-puzzle which examines the meanings and understandings that school principals draw on in leading their schools. Meanings and understandings are both personal and professional. The personal meanings and understandings for each school principal are discussed individually.

Chapter Seven

This is the third chapter that presents analysis of narratives. This second level of analysis responds to the third research sub-puzzle which explores the leadership practices of primary school principals in rural contexts. The chapter discusses the leadership practices in relation to the rural context in which they are operationalised.

Chapter Eight

This is the thesis chapter which reflects on the entire study as I draw it to a close. It provides a recapping of all chapters followed by methodological and theoretical reflections. The conclusions of the study which are drawn around each research sub-puzzle. Then, the chapter

presents the methodological and theoretical contributions of the study. This chapter ends with the implications of my study for further research.

1.8 Chapter conclusion

The orientation chapter provided the backdrop against which this study is conducted. After the statement of the problem, the chapter presented the justifications of the study as provided for in the narrative inquiry methodology. Further, the chapter presented the research objectives and research puzzles that drive the study. Lastly, this chapter explained how this thesis is divided according to chapters.

Chapter Two presents the review of scholarship around leading schools in rural contexts.

CHAPTER TWO

DRAWING FROM THE SCHOLARLY KNOWN

2.1 Introduction

Chapter One introduced the study by presenting the background to the study and the statement of the research problem. I presented three justifications for the study which are personal, practical and theoretical. These were followed by the significance of the study. Thereafter, the aim and objectives of the study and the research puzzles were presented. I then dealt with the definition of operational concepts and provided an outline of all chapters in this study.

This chapter presents the review of literature. This review is presented thematically in order to flag key issues that are relevant to the study based on the main research and sub-research puzzles that drive the study. This thematic presentation focuses on the recurring debates or issues emanating from surveyed literature which speak to the focus and purpose of the study. This study focuses on the narratives of rural primary school principals involving who they are, meanings and understandings they draw on in their leadership as well as their day to day leadership practices. Therefore, it is important to understand the current educational discourses regarding how rurality is understood as it is the natural context within which the phenomenon under study occur. I commence with the shifting discourses on the deficit approach to understanding rurality. This section highlights the fluid nature of these discourses which is important in understanding the "how and why" of the enactment of principals' leadership and other actualities pertinent to their schools. Given the understanding of the shifting nature of such discourses, it is clear that school principals lead schools in different contexts which are also not static. These different contexts affect the day-to-day principals' leadership practices. Shifting discourses are then followed by leading schools in diverse settings. Given the discussion on both of the above, it follows that these rural schools contend with day-to-day operational actualities which are unique to their contexts hence the next theme on adversities facing rural schools. Some of these adversities may emanate from the enactment of policies that are divorced from context thereby becoming an accomplice in the factors that exacerbate these adversities. Thus, this section is followed by the "one size fits all" education policies. In spite of the adversities facing rural schools and the decontextualised nature of the policy framework, some schools are able to register a record of a "success story". For that reason, I subsequently discuss school leadership in challenging contexts. This section highlights the repertoire of leadership practice that seeks to defy adversities and the urgency of improving

academic performance of schools, particularly rural schools. Consequently, the last theme focuses on promoting teaching and learning in rural schools. Regardless of challenges, school principals need to ensure that they promote and sustain the culture of teaching and learning.

2.2 Shifting discourses on the deficit approach to understanding rurality

In this study, leadership dynamics refer to the sum total of internal or external forces that are enablers or inhibitors in the leadership of a school. Given the focus of the study on the dynamics of leading in rural contexts, it is important to consider the emerging shift in educational discourses from deficit narratives to enabling narratives regarding schools located in rural contexts and their leadership. These shifting discourses also highlight the fluid nature of school contexts as they do not remain stagnant.

Discussion of this theme is divided into two sub-themes, namely: the deficit tale and the shift and strengths-based epistemologies.

2.2.1 The deficit tale and the shift

Historically, there has been a perception that rural areas are ill-capacitated to manage their own educational matters and build capacity for learners to participate meaningfully and competitively in the global economy (Schafft & Jackson, 2011). Such a perception arises from the tendency to compare rural locales and urban locales in terms of shortfalls and handicaps (Timmis, Mgqwashu, Naidoo, Muhuro, Trahar, Lucas, Wisker & de Wet, 2019). This portrays rural and urban communities as dichotomies. In America, rural communities and schools have been vilified or belittled by being defined as backward, with schools and education professionals being defined as second class (Surface & Theobald, 2014). This highlights the deficit in the deficit approach to conceptualising rural communities that they are mainly perceived as homogenous while in reality they may differ from one area to another. This is best captured in the assertion that "when you have seen one rural community, you have seen one rural community" (Theodori, 2003). Homogeneousness does not characterise rural communities (Roberts & Green, 2013). This deficit approach and homogeneity lens perpetuates the hegemony of the external agency, which entrenches the mentality of helplessness in rural communities to the total disregard of the potential of the community capital or assets to provide locally, home-brewed interventions. This further legitimises the phenomenon of outmigration,

which fuels the narrative that one may only be successful if one leaves a rural area and lives in a metropolitan area (Surface & Theobald, 2014).

South African discourses on rurality also feature deficit narratives. Rural areas are normally understood on the basis of what they do not have and in the main, also what they will never have (Hlalele, 2014). Such understanding culminates in rural children being seen as fundamentally disadvantaged which belittles them (Avery, 2013). This is a deficit predisposed approach to understanding rural communities. This entrenches the notion that rural communities are unable to rise above their challenges, and find solutions to their unique day-to-day challenges through exploiting their own local strengths. This suggests that rural people and rural schools are in constant need of "parachuted" assistance or an external rescue mission to assist them to alleviate their plight which breeds fertile ground for a "dependency syndrome". Given the perception of being innately disadvantaged, rural children's potentials may be arrested even before the budding stage which defeats the ends of the policy imperatives of any education system. This translates into the perception that these children may be indefinitely trapped in helplessness without any prospects of transforming their livelihoods in the absence of constant external rescue missions. In essence, this means rural communities are denied the opportunity of being both agents of change and beneficiaries of such change. It is in this context that change may become an impossible dream if South African scholarship on rurality, in particular, continues to be predominantly considered through deficit lenses and comprehensions (Moffa & McHenry-Sorber, 2018; Moletsane, 2012). However, there has been a gradual shift from the deficit prone approach to capacity-orientated approach to conceptualising rural areas.

This gradual shift begins to acknowledge the strengths that are prevalent in rural areas and a call is made on rural communities to take advantage of these strengths in order to make their own contextual realities work for them. It is argued that rural areas should not always be paralleled to being pre-modern or less advanced since there is evidence that they are able to survive in the face of their contextual adversities (Ebersohn & Ferreira, 2012). Accordingly, educational practice in rural spaces stimulates community agency and communal understandings of the mission of education (Timmis et al., 2019). Therefore, it need not necessarily be perceived to be synonymous with rurality. Rural spaces themselves are not automatically a liability (Walker & Mathebula, 2019). Rural communities need to be afforded the opportunity to exploit their community capital involving their skills, knowledge, resources

or strengths in a bid to enhance the quality of education in their schools in particular, (Myende, 2014; Myende & Chikoko, 2014) and their socioeconomic conditions in general. This may be impossible if rural residents are relegated to the background while external agency is foregrounded. Community residents are foot soldiers in their own localities who understand their community capital. They therefore need to be put at the forefront to lead their quest to improve their livelihoods utilising their own assets. Impeding the social changes, Moletsane (2012) argues, is the scholarship on rural education research that is being dominated by deficit perspectives which disregard or drown the voice of the disadvantaged and marginalised; the very same people who should benefit from such scholarship. Such an approach fails to be context-conscious thereby pushing the rural communities' local assets to the periphery instead of utilising them as building blocks towards transformation.

2.2.2 Strengths-based epistemologies on rurality

The deficit lenses are questioned through painting a picture of the capacities, assets or strengths that could have enabled rural education to withstand the challenges over time (Hlalele, 2012). In order to survive and sustain their learnings, rural communities have been tapping on their knowledge systems, their capital (Dube & Hlalele, 2017). Amongst other strengths, rural communities are closely-knit with relatively serene environments, rural communities support their schools and the notion of quality education and schools in rural areas are perceived to be the centre of community activities (Hlalele, 2012). Furthermore, rural schools have lower enrolments (Hlalele, 2012; Redding & Walberg, 2012) which enables individual attention and minimises disciplinary challenges (Hlalele, 2012; Raggl, 2019). Effectively, this means that the sizes of rural schools as they are relatively smaller are substantially beneficial, particularly academically, to learners from indigent socioeconomic backgrounds (Schafft, 2016). These are some of the benefits that may often be ignored. Such benefits find their expression in the National Assessment of Educational Progress' (NAEP) Mathematics and Literacy scores of rural schools which are better than those of their metropolitan counterparts despite the intensity of poverty in rural areas (Schafft, 2016). Furthermore, part of the reason why partnership between the school and the community is enhanced and sustained, is because of the smaller school sizes in rural contexts (Schafft, 2016). This indicates that smaller learner population in a school is not necessarily a disadvantage as it may attract the communities to invest in their schools.

Notwithstanding the above, while some rural schools have low enrolments, some have higher enrolments almost equivalent to those of their urban counterparts (Greenough & Nelson, 2015). The more remote rural schools are from urban locations, the smaller they become (Greenough & Nelson, 2015). This suggests that rural settings and schools are not homogenous (Raggl, 2019). Heterogeneity of rural communities and schools located in such communities suggests that rural ecosystems have assets or resources that other rural communities or schools (rural or urban), may not have. Accordingly, these assets provide them with a sustainability edge. Rural communities' assets could be harnessed thereby assisting them to innovate their own context-responsive, sustainable solutions to their context-embedded peculiarities (Moletsane, 2012). Consequently, while context-embedded adversities are being acknowledged, the strengths-based approach recognises the strengths of rural people which could be utilised to roll out their unique social transformation agenda of their locales. In this way, these people become actors in their own agenda.

The Ministerial Report on Rural Education (Department of Education, 2005) acknowledges that the state has failed to expediently address the challenges that rural schools contend with due to the utilisation of the deficit lenses to tackle such challenges. Such acknowledgement suggests that going forward, the Department of Education may be prone to adopting strength-based approaches to policy interventions. Employing such deficit approaches, the government's point of departure is the assumption that the challenges of rural schools and rural communities need the same interventions and policies to alleviate their plight. This constitutes a rebuttable presumption since each rural area may be characterised by different challenges. Such a presumption is not informed by a unique, people-driven voice of ascertaining how best the Department of Education can do justice to their contextual realities. Scholarship on rurality tends to disregard the agency and assets of communities in rural settings which may be deployed towards developing effective place-conscious solutions (Moletsane, 2012) to their day-to-day particularities. Such scholarship on rurality mirrors a South African past of being marginalised and excluded on the basis of, *inter alia*, racial classification. (Oyedemi, 2018). This may have devalued the agency of community capital.

Therefore, capacities-based approach provides the rural communities with the platform to be conscientised about their strengths in order to be able to use them to turn around the academic performance of their schools (Myende, 2015). Exploiting their strengths, rural communities

invoke their agency. This may put rural people in the driving seat of change within their milieu which may translate into ownership and sustainability of such change. Occupying such a driving seat may enable the rural communities to generate solutions to enhance the quality of education instead of resignedly allowing the contextual deficits to dictate the fate of their schools. Notwithstanding the current gradual shift from the deficit lenses of conceptualising rurality to strengths-based approaches, the unique challenges that rural schools contend with should not and cannot be repudiated (Moletsane, 2012). Conversely, research needs to highlight the capacities that these rural communities and schools already possess and suggest on how best they may exploit these to change their livelihoods and those of their schools.

2.3 Leadership: Practices and contexts

Leadership is considered one of the most critical ingredients which influence the improvement of schools and learner performance (Bush, 2018; De Lisle, Annisette & Bowrin-Williams, 2019; James, 2014). The key to redressing the inequalities regarding how educational outcomes are distributed is, inter alia, finding out how high poverty schools (rural schools in this instance) are led (James, 2014; Riley, Montecinos and Ahumada, 2017). However, the diverse nature of the enactment of leadership and divergent perceptions regarding what constitutes effective leadership or how it is operationalised in school contexts is constantly being contested (James, 2014). How principals enact leadership and which practices (the choice of such practices) to enact may be affected by their unique school environments. This suggests that principals from different schools may enact some leadership practices which are common across school contexts (Gurr, 2017) and some that vary from school to school. The effectiveness of such practices is affected by different contexts. Therefore, leadership practices may not be divorced from the context in which they are operationalised. It is on this wavelength that it becomes necessary for the school principals to transform their understandings of their school contexts into enabling leadership practices that invoke stakeholder agency to explore opportunities amidst challenges (Moyo & Perumal, 2019; Sallee & Boske, 2013). This suggests that without translating understandings of contexts into enabling leadership practices, such understandings pale into insignificance and become futile and meaningless.

The enabling school principals' leadership practices and belief systems are shaped by four fundamental realities which are the physical reality, social and political reality, emotional reality as well as spiritual and ethical reality (Elmeski, 2015; Riley, 2013). These realities find

their expression in the practices that school principals enact on a day-to-day basis. Physical reality refers to the built world or physical infrastructure encompassing what normally occurs within such environment and in learners' home environment (Elmeski, 2015). It involves accessibility to and quality of the infrastructure that makes the school and the infrastructure within the community where the school is located. The quality and the availability of school buildings, learners' homes, road networks and social services may have a negative or positive impact on the livelihoods of rural communities in general and teaching and learning in particular. Social and political reality involves interpersonal relations amongst the school community together with the political dynamics prevalent within the community; dynamics that may potentially become the strengths for the school (Elmeski, 2015). Harmonious relationship amongst the stakeholder community through, amongst others, pulling to one direction (vision) is very critical as it may determine the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of the school principal. This may be complemented by the political atmosphere that encourages a vibrant school culture.

Emotional reality refers to leaders being aware of themselves, being able to lead their selves, being alive to their interpersonal relationships and being resilient (Elmeski, 2015). School principals need to understand their inner and outer selves in order to maintain sound interpersonal relations with people within and beyond the bounds of their schools to the benefit of learners and the rest of the stakeholder community. Lastly, spiritual and ethical reality refers to the leaders' value systems that become a bedrock on which their leadership is based. Such value systems become the leaders' moral navigator that influences how leadership is operationalised. As leaders, school principals need to provide direction and purpose (Elmeski, 2015). Therefore their value system is the moral compass; a framework that underpins how they lead their schools.

Notwithstanding contestation regarding effective leadership practices, there are four core leadership practices which are considered crucial to successful school leadership, namely: setting direction, developing people, re-designing the organisation and managing teaching and learning (Leithwoood, 2007). Setting direction, the school principals develop and communicate a shared vision to all stakeholders and set high but achievable expectations for the teachers, for the learners and for themselves (the principals). In developing people, school principals need to afford teachers the opportunity for professional development, collective learning and provision of tailor-made support for individual teachers. Further, re-designing the organisation,

the school principals restructure their schools as communities of practice, changing prevalent structures, enhancing professional engagements and fostering cooperation between the parent community and the school. Lastly, managing teaching and learning processes involves staffing the school with the calibre of teachers commensurate with the school vision, offering support to instructional programmes, monitoring school activities and protecting teachers from being distracted from their core business. However, Leithwood (2007) acknowledges that even though these four core leadership practices are essential for schools to succeed in most contexts, they are not necessarily the only ones or adequate for improvement in any context. Furthermore, differences will always prevail regarding the manner in which these practices are enacted which may yield different results. This suggests that it is not only about understanding the core leadership practices per se. It is also about the "how" of applying such practices commensurate with the principals' unique school contexts which become the determinants of the extent to which such practices enhance learner academic performance. Therefore, successful principals understand that for these core leadership practices and other practices deriving from context to be effective, they need to adapt them so that they respond to the contexts within which the schools are located (Klar, Brewer & Whitehouse, 2013).

The context within which leadership practices are enacted become a make or break factor in terms of effectiveness. Consequently, there has been a detour from pursuance of elusive universal school leadership models and the merging of existing leadership models with context-embedded practices characterised by their uniqueness in different schools (Noman, Hashim & Abdullah, 2016). This suggests that leadership practices that are effective in one school may not necessarily translate into a success story in another school since contexts variably differ even if those schools are located within the same area. Context embraces school structure and culture, family or community backgrounds and external contextual factors which the principals respond to with the intention of influencing them to the advantage of their schools (Noman, Hashim & Abdullah, 2016). This indicates that schools contend with unique internal and external contextual factors that principals need to mitigate if they are to realise the quest for turning around their schools. Evident from this is that successful principals are sensitive to context (Ylimaki & Jacobson, 2011) but being context conscious does not translate into them being driven by context (Gurr, 2015). Allowing themselves to be driven by context may arguably constrain the principals' edge to venture into the unknown terrain in order to transcend context barriers. In this vein, it is important to note that context landscapes influence the leadership behaviour of school principals (Hallinger, 2016). In the context of the above, this

means that effective school principals are not restrained by contexts and neither are their leadership practices. Conversely, their leadership practices may alleviate some contextual constraints. Utilising a cocktail of the core leadership practices that are perceived to be effective in many contexts, successful principals customise how they respond to contexts in order to maximise school performance (Gurr, 2014). Therefore, how principals respond to contexts may become a decisive factor in the quest of their schools to transform and improve learner performance.

Given the perspective that even schools that are located within the same area may deal with different contexts, Bush and Middlewood (2013) suggest that it becomes a rebuttable presumption that challenges in the realm of educational practice are the same within and between countries. Schools within the same district contend with different contextual realities characterised by, *inter alia*, learner demographics, geographic location, enrolment, resource capacity, curriculum, historical background, culture and professional competencies of teachers (Noman, Hashim & Abdullah, 2016). Principals respond differently to their contextual factors hence they tread on different leadership terrains while the common denominator may be their unique individual successes. To this end, it is not adequate for successful school principals to focus on enacting core leadership practices only; however, they also adapt their leadership practices so that they correspond with their unique school contexts (Hallinger, 2016; Klar, Brewer & Whitehouse, 2013). Failure of the principals to adapt their leadership practices to respond to their distinct environments may render such practices futile or substantially minimise their potential for effectiveness. This emphasises that principals need to have nuanced understandings of different contexts within which their schools operate since this may become determinants of principals' leadership success.

In light of the above discussion, there is, *inter alia*, a person-specific context (Hallinger, 2016). This type of context comprises experience, attitudes, skills and knowledge an individual possesses which, in this instance, are pertinent to the job description of a school principal (Hallinger, 2016). Such a context then is person-embedded or it is an "intra-personal context", in this case intra-principal context, since by virtue of being person-embedded it affects how individual principals enact their leadership. These personal resources and experiences become a premise within which the principals' actualities are processed and interpreted thereby culminating in particular leadership practices varying from one principal to the next (Hallinger, 2016). Consequently, it is crucial to also understand leadership practices against the backdrop

of the person-specific context. Excluding some constituents of or in the absence of this type of context, understandings of principals' leadership practices may be partly or completely decontextualised. In the literature I surveyed, provision of person-specific contextual information varies (refer to 2.5.2 Successful schools despite challenging contexts). In some studies they provide the age range and experience or experience only or ages, qualifications and experience. This may create a blind spot regarding the influence of the person-specific or intra-principal contextual actualities or limit the understandings of context in totality and individual principals' leadership practices as well as how these are influenced by contexts.

2.4 Adversities facing rural schools

These adversities are presented as macrosystemic, mesosystemic and microsystemic challenges. Macrosystemic issues refer to the broader national socioeconomic, cultural and political forces that influence how educational practice unfolds. This involves, inter alia, national educational legislative framework and socioeconomic backgrounds of different communities in the country. Mesosystemic challenges flow from macrosystemic issues and they have a direct impact on the schools and the communities at large. In South African context, mesosystemic challenges would refer to those that Provincial Departments of Basic Education contend with. Microsystemic issues involve those challenges that impact on the day-to-day school operations and the practices of teachers as well as the livelihoods of children and their families. These are local issues that would affect the districts of education, circuit management and schools in South African context. These challenges may overlap as they filter down from the macrosystemic challenges. Policy changes at macro level triggers varied consequences for the schools (Maringe, Masinire & Nkambule, 2015). This suggests that the macro level policy reforms have differentiated impacts on different schools in different contexts whether rural or urban.

2.4.1 Macrosystemic challenges

Rural communities are characterised by relatively low population density and smaller school populations (Avery, 2013; Echazarra & Radinger, 2019 Redding & Walberg, 2012; Rosenberg, Christianson & Angus, 2015). This suggests that learner enrolments are low. Such a state of affairs may arise as a result of a depopulated state of rural locales resultant from the exodus or outmigration of rural people to urban areas due to lack of infrastructural development and

employment opportunities (Johansson, 2017; Stelmach, 2011) which may translate into a brain drain of these communities. This exodus may reduce the potential financial base critical to the sustainability of the financial muscle of the rural schools and the brain drain may render rural communities stagnant in terms of development. This is then compounded by the decline in learner enrolments which also diminishes the schools' financial resources since in South Africa, like in many countries, school funding is linked to learner enrolments. Consequently, the diminished fiscal capacity of the schools constrains the schools' buying power to secure resources and services that may be critical for effective teaching and learning to take place. Worsening this reality is the persistent decline in learner enrolments which often results in school consolidation (combining two or more schools) or closure, neither of which is beneficial to the rural communities (Avery, 2013; Kroismayr, 2015; Stelmach, 2011) nor the affected principals. This school consolidation may overstretch the resourcing capacity of the schools thereby compromising the effectiveness of the schools' core business.

Furthermore, school closures or mergers may exacerbate the realities of physical distance between the schools and the communities where the learners reside due to limited availability or unavailability of reliable transport. This may adversely affect regular learner attendance or generally, the attendance rates may be comparatively lower (Hlalele, 2012; Ingutia, 2019; Myende & Chikoko, 2014); a scenario that may have dire consequences for learner academic performance. Given this, it is highlighted that travelling long distances to schools complicates the children's ability to perform a balancing act of committing to school work and school attendance (Gaddah, Munro & Quartey, 2015). Such a scenario may also compromise quality outputs. Notwithstanding the above regarding the decline in learner enrolments, smaller schools in rural areas may afford the teachers the opportunity to provide individualised attention to learners which may improve learner performance. Smaller school communities enable stakeholders to build relationships and enhance their co-operation which may also impact positively on academic performance of learners (Rosenberg, Christianson & Angus, 2015). Therefore, what may be perceived as a challenge in some quarters, rural people may exploit it as an asset to their advantage.

The concept "rural" is utilised as equivalent in meaning with "poverty" in a number of countries including South Africa (Brown, 2010; Hlalele, 2014; van der Vyver, van der Westhuisen & Meyer, 2014). This echoes the observations, as research indicates, that poverty features

prominently in the definition of rural communities and their schools (Hlalele, 2012; Kamper, 2009; Myende & Chikoko, 2014; Nkambule, Balfour, Pillay & Moletsane, 2011). Since the school is a microcosm of the community where it is located, the effects of poverty may manifest themselves in the schools' day-to-day operations and the academic performance of learners, in particular. Generally, the levels of poverty amongst the child population in rural areas are comparatively higher as poverty-stricken children lack proper or sufficient housing, access to quality health services, appropriate child support; a scenario made worse by limited access to clean water, sanitation, opportunities of lifelong learning and electricity (Hlalele, 2014). The Department of Basic Education (2011) has acknowledged underdevelopment of a number of rural areas characterised by disadvantaged schools that lack basic infrastructural capacity for running water, proper road networks, reliable transport, sanitation, electricity and information and communication technology (ICT). These factors may ultimately deprive learners in rural schools of access to an equal quality of education that learners in urbanised environments may receive. Therefore, poverty and underdevelopment pose hindrances to the quest of the school principals to enhance the learning experiences of learners and sustain the desired learner academic achievement levels. Expressly, the levels of poverty in rural communities are mirrored in the perpetual poor resourcing of rural schools in relation to the actual required resourcing threshold (Hlalele, 2014).

Aggravating the resourcing realities of rural schools, are the fiscal constraints that these schools contend with. On independent evaluation of the Universal Secondary Education (USE) policy in Uganda, which in the South African context is equivalent to the no fee school policy, it was found that the school principals lamented the reality of inadequacy of state funding which has not been reconciled with actualities of inflation (Omoeva & Gale, 2016). The state funding received by the rural schools may be inadequate and therefore not commensurate with the unique day-to-day operational challenges of these schools. Arising from such a state of affairs is the question whether the schools are capable or incapable of delivering on their mandate of quality public education. Increasing physical access, which is enrolment, without maintaining quality effectively defeat the very same ends of the no fee school policy. This may be made worse by the diminishing learner numbers which erodes the potential fiscal base of the school.

Contributing to the diminishing learner enrolments could be the failure of the schools to sustain provision of quality education thereby prompting some parents to avoid such schools (Gaddah,

Munro & Quartey, 2015). By avoiding such schools these parents may find other schools that are perceived to offer quality or else this may translate into drop-outs. Some parents in urban locations even send their children to schools in rural contexts (Raggl, 2019). Further, in view of such a predicament, opportunities for fundraising for rural schools may be constrained by, *inter alia*, the sparse population density of rural communities (Rosenberg, Christianson & Angus, 2015) and the poverty levels prevalent in such communities. Inadequacy of funds culminating in under-resourcing diminishes the capacity of the school to provide customised programmes and services to cater for the diversified needs of their learners (du Plessis & Mestry, 2019; Levin, Manship, Chambers, Johnson & Blankenship, 2011). Given under resourcing, this suggests that the rural schools may be thwarted in their bids to provide a diversified curriculum thereby excluding some learners and leaving their potentials untapped. To this end, the mandate of the school to deliver quality public education is considerably compromised.

2.4.2 Mesosystemic challenges

Rural schools are faced with a myriad of uniquely contextual challenges. However, it may not be unexpected for some of these challenges to also manifest themselves in urban schools but with different levels of intensity. Furthermore, the school principals and other educational leaders in rural areas are faced with some challenges that are different to those of their metropolitan counterparts (Gross & Jochim, 2015). Unaddressed, I argue, these challenges may constrain maximum use of the lifeline that schools in rural areas are perceived to offer to the rural communities in terms of poverty reduction and transformation. Like its counterpart in Ghana and Kenya, recruiting and retaining teachers in rural areas also pose a grave challenge for the Department of Basic Education in South Africa (Kamere, Makatiani & Nzau, 2019; Owusu-Acheampong & Williams, 2015) and the school principals, in particular. This becomes a serious setback to the quest for the delivery of quality public education. It is in this context that globally, the enlisting of services of teachers of high calibre becomes crucial for the future provision of education in rural settings (Adie & Barton, 2012). Rural schools may find it difficult to attract highly qualified teachers and principals since they may be reluctant to serve in such schools due to, *inter alia*, perceptions of being under-resourced (Echazarra & Radinger, 2019; Goos, Dole & Geiger, 2011; Hlalele, 2014; Owusu-Acheampong & Williams, 2015; Roberts & Green, 2013). The working conditions under which teachers in rural areas have to

work may deter them from either accepting posts or remaining in such areas for longer periods which threatens the academic stability of the schools. To this end, remote schools may face persistent shortage of teachers (Fishman, 2015, Kamere, Makatiani & Nzau, 2019), particularly for Mathematics and Science.

A teacher is arguably one of the most critical resources a school should have if it is to maintain its effectiveness in the execution of its core business. A dearth of teachers brings about uncertainties regarding uninterrupted discharge of its mandates. I argue that in an atmosphere of uncertainty it may be an impossible dream to discharge "effectiveness". This impossible dream may translate into poor quality to those at the receiving end of public education. Exacerbating the above challenges, access to critical professional development opportunities for teachers in rural schools is constrained and this professionally isolates them (Goos, Dole & Geiger, 2011, Miller, 2015; Raggl, 2019). Such restricted access may be fuelled by, amongst others, financial constraints or distance between the school and the metropolitan centres or the venues where professional development workshops are held. Professional isolation deprives these teachers of critical professional support and excludes them from current debates and latest developments in their specialisation fields. Complicating the provision of rural education is, inter alia, the geographic location or physical isolation however, psychological isolation aggravates this challenge (Sher, 2019; Stelmach, 2011). This may be detrimental to the desired competitive edge of these teachers thereby adversely impacting on the quality of teaching and learning processes. It may be in this context that notwithstanding the government's pro-poor policies to enhance rural education, rural leaners still receive poor quality education manifesting in these learners' comparatively poor performance (Hlalele, 2012; Nkambule, Balfour, Pillay & Moletsane (2011). In Australia, the academic performance of leaners in rural schools has, in the main, been lower than that of their urban counterparts (Roberts & Green, 2013). This suggests that learners enrolled in rural schools are disadvantaged and therefore, they may not be on par with the learners in urban schools.

2.4.3 Microsystemic challenges

School principals leading schools in rural contexts are overloaded (Stewart & Mathews, 2015). The poor resourcing capacities of rural schools may compel the principals to take maximum teaching loads and in some cases teach multi-grade classrooms (Cortez-Jiminez, 2012; Starr &

White, 2008; Raggl, 2019; Taole, 2013). The former, principals taking maximum teaching load, suggests that it may be difficult for the principals to perform a juggling act of teaching loads, school leadership and administrative duties. It also suggests that rural schools may from time to time face a shortage of teachers and principals due to the reluctance of teachers to accept posts offers in rural districts (Fusarelli & Militello, 2012; Kamere, Makatiani & Nzau, 2019; Lock, Budgen, Lunay & Oakley, 2012). Under such circumstances, it becomes an elusive dream for the rural school principals to achieve effective leadership for the betterment of the schools' core business. The latter, teaching multi-grade classrooms, suggests that there is either a lack of adequate floor space or academic staff to cater for all leaners in all grades that the school offers. This starkly highlights that learners enrolled in rural schools may have unequal access to unequal quality of education which may contribute to rural communities remaining disadvantaged and marginalised. Adding to the under resourcing challenges that principals are faced with, is that small rural schools may not qualify for state-paid support staff or they may not have the fiscal capacity to hire services of support staff while this is a common feature in bigger schools (Johnson & Howley, 2015). This intensifies the impact of the administrative burden that the principals have to carry to the detriment of their leadership mandates. For the school operations to be effective, it is my contention that the school principals need to reconcile all facets of school life involving administration, academics and leadership and management. Consequently, given the above, principals of rural schools (which may be relatively smaller) are likely to have smaller personnel numbers which constrains the school's trajectory of possibilities and the ability to maximally tap into its agency.

In smaller-sized schools, particularly in rural areas, teachers have no choice but to contend with heavy teaching loads in various subjects (Owusu-Acheampong & Wlliams, 2015). Such duty allocations demand more time for lesson preparation and accompanying prescribed administration. This places a heavy burden on the teachers as they have to grapple with multiple subjects content simultaneously (Owusu-Acheampong & Williams, 2015). This scenario is paradoxical. While the school principal needs to ensure that there is a teacher in every class for every subject offered, overloading teachers with multiple subjects may render them ineffective. Their ineffectiveness deprives the learners of teachers with a highly competitive edge in every subject they take at school. Lack of the competitive edge may, in some quarters, be expressly considered to impact on school performance hence the poor academic performance of learners in some rural schools (Hlalele, 2012; Roberts & Green, 2013). This disparity in academic

achievement of rural and urban schools may be attributed to differentiated availability of academic staff and physical infrastructure (Stelmach, 2011). Compounding this challenge is the difficulty in attracting highly competitive service providers as they either out of reach or they perceive doing business with rural schools not to yield expected profits (Johnson & Howley, 2015; Yettick, Baker, Wickersham & Hupfield, 2014). Being unable to choose from a pool of service providers prevents the schools from utilising reputable and relatively affordable services which may constrain the schools' purse or deny them the best value for their money. However, on the other hand, smaller personnel numbers may be perceived as an asset since it may enable the principal to forge strong professional bond with the teachers. Such a bond may persuade the teachers to remain in rural schools for an extended period of time (Lock, Budgen, Lunary & Oakley, 2012). This means rural schools do have some advantages at their disposal (Sher, 2019). Despite all the challenges that rural schools may face, the principals need to identify and exploit those advantages to launch their schools as a success project.

2.5 "One size fits all" education policies

Discussing the above, this section focuses on probing education policymaking and decontextualising education policy interventions: South Africa.

2.5.1 Probing policymaking in education

Perceptions that dominate the terrain of conceptualisation of rural are that rural areas are stagnant and characterised by cultural homogeneity which distinctly detaches them from urban areas (Reid, 2015). Such perceptions are more likely to cloud the lenses through which the changing landscape and uniqueness of rural areas may be appreciated. Flowing from this is the deficit approach to policy formulation which is basically based on government assumptions regarding what it presumes to be a pertinent response to adversities facing rural schools. This is done without ascertaining "from the horse's mouth" the nuanced understandings of their context- embedded challenges and how best the government policy interventions can address them (Myende, 2015). Education policy interventions that are premised on the deficiency terrain of understanding rurality gives birth to a decontextualised policy framework which

becomes complicit in the schools fighting a losing battle against poor quality of education and underperformance.

The above assertion suggests that some national education policy frameworks promulgated specifically for rural schools are, in the main, unable to accommodate national and regional differences typifying such schools. Such a scenario culminates in unprecedented results but adverse to policy intentions (Johnson & Howley, 2015). In the South African context, national education policies may fail to appreciate provincial and education districts differences that characterise rural schools in those jurisdictions. It is in this vein that despite enactment of various policy interventions to tackle rural school challenges, there have not been fundamental changes for the intended beneficiaries of such interventions (Maringe, Masinire & Nkambule, 2015; Moletsane, 2012; Prew & Maringe, 2014). Enhancing quality of education in rural areas has been challenging (Li & Xing, 2018). In essence, it becomes a futile exercise for governments to formulate "decontextualised" policies that are claimed to be inclusively targeting rural schools without contextually discerning their unique actualities. Such policies are more likely to defeat their own ends since in theory, they are made to accommodate rural education while ironically in practice they do not work for rural schools.

2.5.2 Decontextualising education policy interventions: South Africa

The South African school funding model creates the categorisations of no fee paying schools and fee paying schools in the public schooling system (Mestry & Berry, 2016). The former are largely ranked as quintiles 1, 2 and 3. These are considered poor schools located in poverty-stricken communities. The latter are categorised as quintiles 4 and 5 and they are regarded as the least poor schools. Scholarship indicates that poverty and underdevelopment feature prominently in the conceptualisation of rurality and rural communities where rural schools are located (du Plessis & Mestry, 2019; Kamper, 2009; Loots, Ebersohn, Ferreira & Eloff, 2012; Myende & Chikoko, 2014; Nkambule, Balfour, Pillay & Moletsane, 2011). This suggests that a substantial number of no fee schools are located in rural areas where the levels of poverty, unemployment and illiteracy, are considered comparatively higher. No fee paying schools receive higher funding allocations per learner than their fee paying counterparts and they are not allowed to charge mandatory school fees. Though fee paying schools receive lesser funding allocations, they are allowed to charge school fees. This raises questions regarding these no fee

school allocations; whether they are high enough to satisfy the minimum resource capacity threshold and positively influence the schools' academic performance in poor schools or ameliorate the unique contextual challenges of the rural schools, in particular.

Receiving higher funding allocations per learner does not necessarily translate into these allocations having the capacity to respond directly to the uniqueness of different rural school settings. Ultimately, a critical question arising from the above is whether this no fee school policy, for all intents and purposes, specifically accommodates and targets challenges in rural schools or whether it broadly applies to all poverty-stricken schools in different contexts; urban, rural and suburban. Aggravating this scenario is the provision that public funding may only be used for prescribed transactions irrespective of the real life, day-to-day operational needs of individual rural schools (Naicker & Ncokwana, 2016). This also constitutes decontextualisation of policy provisions. To this end, expressly observed is that there are no education policies that are specifically designed to cater for schools operating within multiple deprived contexts (Maringe et al., 2015). Such state of affairs explicitly confines rural schools to the cycle of poor quality of education and to the peripheries of educational developments.

Furthermore, the South African school funding model provides that the number of state-paid teachers allocated to a public school is determined by the number of learners registered in that public school. This is referred to as the Post Provisioning Model (PPM) (Provincial Department of Basic Education, 2017; Salmon & Sayed, 2016). Similarly, the allocation of deputy principals and heads of department is based on learner enrolment figures (Salmon & Sayed, 2016). Central to enabling this model is the fiscal capacity of the Department of Basic Education. Arguably, this model effectively fails to consider that though the number of learners may be smaller, the number of subjects or the comprehensiveness of the curriculum that the schools offer is not reduced. In the same vein, the provisions that prescribe the number of school leadership posts, save for the principalship, also disregard the reality that the number of learners may be relatively lower but the school may have a diverse curriculum and extra-curricular programmes. Such a school still needs managers for different departments commensurate with its curriculum structure. Based on that, the volume of the leadership responsibilities of each principal may vary on the basis of unique school contexts with some having to contend with overloads in the face of reduced school leadership posts. Accordingly,

the capacity of a school to offer a diversified curriculum and extra-curricular activities may be severely curtailed.

Some schools may then be compelled to narrow the curriculum, resort to multi-grade teaching or reduce enrolment; particularly in no fee rural schools which may have public funding as their main reliable revenue. Such constraints may impede the quest of the school to fulfil its mandate of quality public education and the capacity to tap the untapped in terms of learner potentials. This perpetuates, particularly, marginalisation of rural communities. Exacerbating this predicament is the Three-year Cycle Collective Agreement, 1 of 2017 which states that from 2018 the Post Provisioning Norm (PPN) for schools will remain unchanged for the next three years, no new posts will be created and school principals need to ensure that enrolments remain unchanged or within the capacity of the 2017 PPN (Provincial Department of Basic Education, 2017). For the duration of this agreement, schools may have to helplessly contend with increased enrolment but without any prospects of being allocated teachers. Neither will they be able to revise the curriculum thereby require new teachers in response to their immediate actualities. In my view, this defeats the ends of the legislative framework and the funding model that seek to be redistributive in redressing the imbalances of the past particularly in rural areas. As a system of deploying teachers, PPM is clearly not needs-driven but it is budget-driven. Given this, the PPM is effectively and paradoxically divorced from context and therefore futile.

In the American context, there are policies that are specifically promulgated to turn around the academic landscape of only rural schools or both urban and rural schools; with recent ones being the Race to the Top (RTT), School Improvement Grant (SIG) and Rural Education Achievement Programme (REAP) (Johnson & Howley, 2015). However, given prescriptions attached to these policies, they are not contextually responsive to the real life issues that rural schools grapple with since these schools are not homogenous (Johnson & Howley, 2015; Raggl, 2019). Unlike America, South Africa appears not to have policies or programmes that are explicitly created to enhance academic performance of rural schools or deal with challenges that characterise rural schools and improve rural education in the main. Within this context, it is argued that the same size fits all approach to policymaking, based on a flawed assumption that poverty in South Africa is homogenous, is failing to alleviate the plight of the poorest communities and their schools (Maringe et al., 2015). It constitutes a paradox that on the one

hand, rural schools, irrespective of their contextual adversities, are expected to perform on par with their counterparts in metropolitan areas. On the other hand, while the government acknowledges that rural schools contend with unique challenges, it does not subsequently design policies that speak explicitly to such uniqueness. This suggests that inequalities in education and marginalisation of rural communities and rural education still exist and these are perpetually entrenched by the persistent enactment of such same size fits all policies.

Consequently, the government needs to move away from enacting decontextualised policies that are inclined to cater for the urban minority to the total disregard of the marginalised and disadvantaged majority or fail to prioritise them (Maringe et al., 2015). On this wavelength it is important to note that the standardised national curriculum mandates may lead to the enactment of the curriculum that is detached from contexts of local communities and their schools (Schafft & Jackson, 2011). This further raises questions regarding the relevance of the national curriculum to the unique needs of rural communities and their schools. If relevance of the curriculum is questioned, then its capacity to transform the livelihoods of rural people and schools also remains a question. Such a lack of connection between school programmes and learner employment aspirations may discourage learners from attending schools. Therefore, such policies may enhance learners' physical access to schools while ironically hinder learners from accessing quality teaching and learning that maximally taps into their potential and responds to their local realities. In light of the above, it is argued that in South Africa, notwithstanding some improvements, the de-contextualised policy that seeks to redress the past inequities may be aggravating instead of narrowing the disparities between the advantaged and disadvantaged schools, particularly the rural schools (Maringe et al., 2015). If the redress policies are to accomplish their intended consequences, they need to be sensitive to unique real-life contexts of the schools they are meant for.

2.6 School leadership in challenging contexts

Presenting this section, a cocktail of leadership traits and the profiling of leadership in deprived school contexts will be examined.

2.6.1 A cocktail of leadership traits

Successful principals of schools facing a multiplicity of challenging contexts, including rural

schools, need to possess a particular set of leadership traits (Badenhorst & Koalepe, 2014) which may be commensurate with the unique set of challenges prevalent in their schools. However, effective leadership of schools is not a "one cap suits all" (Miller, 2018). The meaning of successful principals need to be understood within the context of the schools they are leading and the culture that underlies the daily operations of the school (Badenhorst & Koalepe, 2014). This highlights that leadership cannot be separated from the context in which it is operationalised since schools, rural schools in particular, are not homogenous. School principals are, in my view, leading agents of change therefore, they need to lead change within the stakeholder community towards transforming their schools into relatively successful schools. Being agents of change, the school principals in consultation with all stakeholders, need to create an achievable vision that is constantly communicated and reinforced to the entire stakeholder community so that it becomes a shared vision (Badenhorst & Koalepe, 2014; Davis & Boudreaux, 2019; Hitt & Player, 2019). Communicating the school vision to teachers, learners and parents may facilitate the process of internalising it which may translate into this vision becoming a catalyst towards change processes and enhancement of teaching and learning processes. To this end, every member of the stakeholder community is brought on board understanding exactly what is expected of them. This state of affairs can align their support and professional synergies with the direction their organisation is pursuing.

Efficacious school principals leading poverty-stricken but successful schools enacted multi-dimensional and a dynamic cocktail of leadership strategies in order to effectively deal with their contextual adversities (Pashiardis, Savvides, Lytra and Angelidou, 2011, Woods & Martin, 2016). This becomes one of the leadership imperatives since, other than increased accountability obligations, the 21st century principals contend with a multiplicity of challenges which affect the core business of the school. This then suggests that school principals in rural areas need to metaphorically wear numerous caps other than the one for leading the school's core business (Cortez-Jiminez, 2012; Gross & Jochim, 2015; Renihan & Noonan, 2012). These include the roles of being form teachers, subject specialists, assessment specialists, parent leaders, agents of change, counselling psychologists, social workers and political leaders. This enables the principals to employ a multi-pronged approach that is responsive to the nature of challenges that arise in the wake of executing their core business mandates. School principals tailor-make the programmes that respond to learners' challenges. If such programmes are ineffective, principals would bend the policies to respond directly to contextual actualities

(Pashiardis et al., 2011). It is in this context that a Chilean principal persuaded teachers to avert giving homework since some learners travelled long distances (Riley, Montecinos & Ahumada, 2017). This constitutes a multi-faceted approach to leading schools. Such a posture mitigates challenges, which may otherwise compromise teaching and learning, to the benefit of learners. It may be in this context that the assertion is made that for school principals to facilitate change, they need to adopt diversified multiple roles (Fullan, 2010). The position of the school principal has become manifold with the increase of responsibilities due to, amongst others, policy obligations (Duncan & Stock, 2010; Lawrent, 2019). Given this, the school principals need to understand that the multiple roles that they have to play are determined by the material conditions prevalent in their schools and the communities where those schools are located.

What drives successful principals amid the multiplicity of their roles are their individual core value systems (Coburn, 2017; Pashiardis, Savvides, Lytra & Angelidou, 2011; Spillane & Anderson; 2014). Drawing on and articulating their value systems, these principals create a clearly defined sense of direction and purpose for all the stakeholders (Pashiardis, Savvides, Lytra & Angelidou, 2011). These belief systems are shaped by what Riley (2013) and Elemski (2013) refer to as spiritual and ethical reality of the school principal. Thus, this reality becomes the bedrock of their moral authority. School principals may articulate their core values through what they are saying and what they are not saying with the latter being communicated through how they enact their leadership. For instance, through subscribing and portraying highly professional work ethics in the interaction with all stakeholders, it may set an example for all stakeholders regarding how they need to conduct their day-to-day school business. How the school principals perceive and understand their leadership, involving reflecting on their current practice, their interactive engagements with stakeholders and their vision for their schools, is influenced by their core value systems (Ganon-Shilon & Schechter, 2019; Pashiardis, Savvides, Lytra & Angelidou, 2011). In essence, which leadership terrain to pursue, whether principle-centred or position-centred and how such leadership aligns with the school vision; flows from the values that drive the school principals. This accentuates the moral authority of the leadership of successful school principals within which they, on a day-to-day basis, articulate the school vision, verbal or non-verbal, to the stakeholder community (Hitt & Player, 2019; Pashiardis, Savvides, Lytra & Angelidou, 2011). This suggests that in the absence of a clear value system, the school principals may be unable to instil a sense of direction and purpose in the school, which then minimises its chances of becoming an effective school. For instance, if

the school principal does not value transparency, accountability and people-centred leadership, that principal is most likely to be ineffective as a leader, tolerate ineffectiveness and corruption and fail to ensure the school fulfils its mandates. Consequently, the principals' core value system becomes the soul of their leadership.

2.6.2 Profiling leadership in deprived school contexts

I present this section under the following subtopics, namely: satisfying learners' basic needs, continuing professional development for teachers, conducive teaching and learning environment, prudent management of school finances.

2.6.2.1 Satisfying learners' basic needs

In the study conducted in Missouri in USA on a high poverty, high achieving rural primary school it was found that the principal emphasised that for learners' academic performance to be enhanced, their basic needs like food, clothes and healthcare needed to be taken care of (Woods and Martin, 2016). This school was led by a principal who had fourteen years experience as a teacher and five of which he had been the principal at the participant school. The holistic approach this principal adopted for the education of the child in totality suggests that if basic needs of the child are not addressed, it may become impossible for the school principal to ensure sustained improvement in the school's academic performance. Thus, this suggests that addressing the child's basic needs becomes a prerequisite for desired learner outcomes. For instance, learners who attend classes on empty stomachs and walk long distances to schools may find it difficult to maintain high levels of concentration and regular school attendance. Such a scenario derails the quest of the schools to ensure that learners from poor community backgrounds maximally benefit from access to education.

The Department of Basic Education in South Africa and their Ugandan counterpart acknowledge the importance of addressing the children's basic needs through, amongst others, the provision of a nutrition programme in poor schools which ensures that children receive at least one meal a day (Aliyar, Gelli & Hamdani, 2015; Gaddah, Munro & Quarter, 2015). In cases where the school caters for the basic needs of the learners, the principals made it their mission to reach out to the communities to mobilise support (Woods & Martin, 2016).

Reaching out to communities may not be difficult for the principals who consistently articulate the school vision to the entire stakeholder community. In such a case, communities are more likely to remain on standby should the principal sound a clarion call for assistance. It is in this vein that research consistently indicates the nexus between learners' academic performance and a number of social and economic factors or poverty levels that principals of poor schools, particularly rural schools in this case, uniquely deal with in their line of duty (Jensen, 2013; Kamara, 2018; Tomas, 2012; Van der Berg, 2011). Therefore, school principals need to reasonably mitigate these socioeconomic issues if they are to make inroads in their commitment to successful schools that provide quality public education.

2.6.2.2 Continuing professional development for teachers

The study conducted in Cyprus involved five successful rural primary school principals in their fifties since the main criterion for principalship appointments is age (Pashiardis et al., 2011). Conversely, in the South African context applicants should have, amongst others, seven years experience to qualify for principalship appointment (Provincial Department of Basic Education, 2019). All the participant principals had been teachers for twenty eight to thirty five years and principals for three to five years. These principals understood their responsibility to inspire professional growth and emphasised continuing professional development for teachers and they led from the front in this regard, as they themselves constantly engaged in further education (Cecilia, Kagema & Gachahi, 2019; Pashiardis et al., 2011). A Chilean study selected three effective primary school principals leading high poverty schools with experience ranging from two to twenty years. Echoing the above finding, the school management team committed to maximising professional development with weekly engagements on educational matters thereby minimising administration (Riley, Montecinos & Ahumada, 2017). Teachers at this school were granted state scholarship to further their studies (Riley, Montecinos & Ahumada, 2017). This indicates that professional development becomes a critical ingredient in the schools' endeavours to turn around the landscape of academic achievements for learners. This distinctly highlights that teachers need to become lifelong learners themselves. However, in some rural contexts principals and teachers may receive limited professional development opportunities beyond the workshops conducted by the Department (Mukarami & Hernandez, 2019). It is my contention that for the rural schools to remain relevant to their mandates and the communities they serve, principals and teachers need to receive continuing professional

development which caters for their typical reality. Therefore, professional development becomes the bedrock of the meaningful survival of the school.

Furthermore, professional development of the principals and teachers prioritises their schools. This creates a learning environment that enhances teacher effectiveness, generates new professional knowledge (Pashiardis et al., 2011) and improves the teachers' level of understanding of pedagogical content knowledge. This means school principals, through invoking their individual agency, need to create a school atmosphere sustaining effectiveness in teaching and learning (Shava & Heystek, 2019). Therefore, school principals lead the culture of teaching and learning in which all teachers are professionally ready and competent to perform their responsibilities. Principals in successful high poverty schools utilise the existence of a culture of learning in their schools to instil the culture of professional dialoguing which capacitates the teachers and positively affect teaching and learning processes (Riley, Montecinos & Ahumada, 2017; Woods & Martin, 2016). This resonates with the observations that school principals should become strong teaching and learning leaders (Bush, 2014). Further, these principals should display leadership traits that are tailor-made to enhance learning experiences through appraising teachers on latest educational developments pertinent to the effectiveness of teaching and learning. It is through this dialoguing that the principals are able to provide a critical support framework for teachers and affords them a voice in decision-making processes. This creates a culture of trust and forges close relations amongst the teachers and between the principals and the teachers. Such an environment encourages the teachers to strive for innovations in their teaching and be prepared to go beyond the call of duty in the execution of their duties. Given the above, it then becomes an inevitable eventuality that the principals need to "talk the talk and walk the talk" if they are to, together with all stakeholders, realise the school vision.

2.6.2.3 Conducive teaching and learning environment

For the culture of teaching and learning to be sustained in the school, school principals need to ensure that the environment is conducive to teaching and learning for all stakeholders. A South African study conducted in the Free State province in one education district involved three secondary school principals of high poverty, high achieving schools. The age range of the principals was early to late fifties, with all having Bachelor of Education (Honours) and

Advanced Certificate in Education: School Leadership and Management. These were urban schools surrounded by and serving informal settlements (Badenhorst & Koalepe, 2014). Principals of successful, high poverty schools believe that it is of vital importance to create a secure teaching and learning environment; a conducive organisational atmosphere (Badenhorst & Koalepe, 2014; Cecilia, Kagema & Gachahi, 2019). Instilling a sense of belonging, the Chilean study on effective high poverty schools concluded that the prerequisite is a safe school environment (Riley, Montecinos & Ahumada, 2017). The principals are duty bound to establish a school climate that can maximise the productivity of all stakeholders towards the realisation of the collectively crafted and cherished school vision. An unsecure school climate may degenerate into instability and distract the focus of both teachers and learners on the desired educational outcomes. Further, internal and external factors have an influence, on principals' leadership and the day-to-day school operations.

Manifestation of societal challenges (external) within the school may have a direct impact on the principals' and learners' performances (Badenhorst & Koalepe, 2014). This suggests that the principals need to become the first and the last line of defence in their schools in order to eliminate exposing learners and teachers to unfavourable and deleterious environments. This reconciles the disparity between internal and external obligations (Ganon-Shilon & Schechter, 2019). I believe that there can be no effective teaching and learning if teachers and learners are forced to watch their backs all the time because of, for example, gang violence fuelled by encroachment of gang elements into the school from the community. Therefore, the principals need to be in the forefront of the campaign for safe communities and safe schools. However, principals of successful schools in rural contexts understand that they cannot achieve such a safe school climate single-handedly; they need to network and forge partnerships with communities where the schools are located and apply place-conscious approaches (Gallay, Marckini-Polk, Schroeder & Flanagan, 2016; Pashiardis et al., 2011; Schaft, 2016). It is through trust that the community willingly becomes the school's armour against encroachments that may threaten safety (Riley, Montecinos & Ahumada, 2017). Unstable and unsafe school climate may discourage regular attendance by teachers and learners which may have dire consequences for learner performance and ultimately translate into learner dropouts. This further implies that for the principals to maintain the commitment of teachers to some critical after school tuition programmes, for example, they need to accomplish this prerequisite of safe school environment. It is in this context that teachers, who are otherwise inclined to

work for shorter periods in rural schools, are encouraged to remain for longer periods by principals who create and maintain a positive school climate (Rosenberg, Christianson & Angus, 2015). Such a climate is considerate of the emotional well-being of the school personnel.

2.6.2.4 Prudent management of school finances

School principals, urban or rural, need to ensure that they take calculated and prudent financial decisions in order to maximise the capacity of the school purse. In the face of inadequate fiscal resources, the principals of successful, high poverty schools in disadvantaged communities highlighted that it was of critical importance for the principals to possess requisite financial management skills (Badenhorst & Koalepe, 2014). Given limited state funding, such skills enable them to execute their financial mandates judiciously (Basson & Mestry, 2019). For the long-term, meaningful survival of the schools and their capacity to fulfil their mandates, principals need to ensure that their financial responsibilities are discharged efficiently and within the ambit of the policy provisions. This may only be achieved if the principals are equipped with the relevant financial expertise. Such expertise may enable the principal to understand the financial capacity of the school, avoid overstretching this capacity and prioritising the unique needs of the school. Principals with such expertise are more likely to align the school budgetary processes with the school vision and balance the financial needs of all facets of school life. These principals canonise financial accountability (Badenhorst & Koalepe, 2014). This suggests that they emphasise transparency regarding the use of public funds to advance the interests of the school. Transparency may translate into the strengthening of the relationship of trust between the principal and all stakeholders. Such trust may encourage the stakeholder community and the community at large to earnestly heed to the principal's call to mobilise financial resources for the school from different sources in the wake of current limited funding of schools. In Cyprus, different communities and associations of parents support their schools with the intention of improving their schools' infrastructural capacities and other school programmes (Pashiardis et al., 2011). Key to continued existence of rural schools may be the sound school-community partnership (Surface & Theobald, 2014). This may only occur if the principal adheres to transparent financial accountability. Further, driving the emphasis on financial management skills, is the principal's commitment that learners from poverty-stricken backgrounds need to receive relatively similar quality of education as their

other counterparts (Badenhorst & Koalepe, 2014). To this end, it becomes clear that such skills are more likely to mitigate the adverse effects of inadequacy of funding while lack of accounting skills may exacerbate the resourcing plight of poor schools.

2.7 Promoting teaching and learning in rural schools

Following are the subtopics within which promoting teaching and learning in rural schools will be discussed: the role of policies, the leadership equation, leadership's nuanced contextual understandings, resourcing capacities in rural schools, incentivising the rural teacher workforce and networking for school improvement.

2.7.1 The role of policies

Turning the tide against the poor academic performance of schools, particularly in rural areas, remains a challenge in different contexts. This becomes a contentious, contemporary issue because the demand for highly skilled citizenry in different areas of the labour market in developed and developing economies is perpetually increasing (Little & Rolleston, 2014). Such discourses provide compelling reasons for governments and communities to seriously contemplate on strategies to effectively turn around the landscape of academic progress in poor performing schools, particularly in rural schools. Governments need to understand that "one cap fits all" policies do not meet the needs of the misunderstood, marginalised and disadvantaged rural schools (Bryant, 2010). In formulating educational policies it is crucial that the contextual interpretations and enactment are taken into consideration (Tromp & Datzberger, 2019) given the complex and non-linear nature of educational practice. It may become an impossible dream to contemplate on and launch improvement trajectories for rural schools without understanding the immediate challenges of rurality and rural communities (Fishman, 2015). This becomes necessary since each rural area and rural school district possesses its own distinctive character and contends with its own distinctive problems. Therefore, examining and understanding the distinctive character and problems of rural areas may narrow the disjuncture between policy and practice. Such narrowing may translate into meaningful enactment of education policy that bridges the gap between what the policy intends to achieve and what it actually achieves in the context in which it (policy) is operationalised. This may enhance the levels of effectiveness of the policy implementation and thus ultimately

improve the quality of education, particularly, in rural school districts. Consequently, the point of departure for transforming rural education is the formulation of a policy framework that is context conscious which breeds fertile ground for, amongst others, bottom up institution-initiated improvements. It is for this reason that, for rural schools, fluidity of the policy framework becomes necessary to tailor-make policy provisions, originally urban-centric, to the needs of rural schools which are mainly facing geographic isolation (Gross & Jochim, 2015). Being at the coalface of delivery of education, such fluidity may create opportunities for rural schools to exploit their strengths and customise policy to target their distinct realities.

Given the preceding assertion, employing area-based approaches to formulation of policies may mitigate challenges characterising a particular area (Maringe et al., 2015). However, this is not necessarily confined to the geographical location of an area. In the absence of tailor-made policies that respond to the uniqueness of contexts of rural communities and schools, achieving equal access, equitable resource allocation and equal opportunities for all schools becomes a challenge (Gallo & Beckman, 2016; Maringe et al., 2015). Failing to target contexts may become a recipe for persistent entrenchment of the marginalisation of disadvantaged rural schools which engenders poor quality of education. This diminishes the prospects of overhauling the landscape of academic performance in these schools thereby bringing them on par with their urban counterparts. It is thus important to note that changes in national education policy have a different impact in different schools (Maringe et al., 2015). Therefore, policies that foreground contexts provide for a transformation process that is relatively all-encompassing; an approach which may improve multiple deprived schools. Such policies are more likely to exploit the capacities and resources that are prevalent in rural communities to advance their own educational interests. It is important to note that previously, in a number of countries, development in rural areas has been hindered by a top down approach to improvement and it has been driven by supply (Biriescu & Babaita, 2014). This indicates that top down approaches are de-contextualised and they portray that rural areas are misunderstood which render them unresponsive to real life issues of different communities.

2.7.2 The leadership equation

Improving the academic performance of rural schools and the quality of education can no longer be relegated to the periphery. This resonates with the assertion that a crucial challenge for schools in the 21st century is to achieve and maintain high levels of academic performance

for all learners (Fusarelli & Militello, 2012). For rural schools to improve and sustain such improvement, it becomes critical that they are led by effective school leaders since without such a crop of leaders, having quality rural schools will remain elusive (Riley, Montecinos & Ahumada, 2017). Given the above context, it is argued that "leadership is the, or at least one of the, major missing links among dysfunctional schools and similarly, leadership is the answer, or at least one of the key answers to why some schools in areas of multiple deprivation perform well" (Chikoko, Naicker & Mthiyane, 2015, p. 453; Chiome, 2011). This suggests that the contexts do not necessarily dictate the landscape of academic achievements of multiple deprived schools. The principals' leadership practices may mitigate contexts to the advantage of the school. How school principals lead their schools may speak volumes about how they understand their contexts and about the terrain the school is taking or should take to realise its vision. This indicates that effective leadership becomes a crucial factor in the quest for transforming rural schools. It further suggests that even if an enabling policy framework that is sensitive to context is put in place, it may be rendered futile in the absence of effective principals in rural schools.

In addition, effective school principals need to provide a quality support framework for all stakeholders and create opportunities for teachers to receive continuing professional development. This may ensure that the teachers and the schools remain relevant to the curriculum mandates and the needs of the communities they serve. It is on this wavelength that an assertion that an often ignored but critical factor which enhances teacher quality is the role of the school principal, is made (Fusarelli & Militello, 2012). Being a successful principal in terms of leading human resources can be a crucial ingredient in putting the school on the turnaround launchpad (Tingle, Corrales & Peters, 2019). However, the realm of educational practice, being typified by diversities, complexities and varying pressures on both learners and teachers to enhance academic performance, a "one man show" leadership model that revolves around the principal is neither desirable nor sustainable (Bush, 2014). Moreover, given such complexities and diversities, a(n) unidimensional approach to school leadership may not work (Bush, Bell & Middlewood, 2019). Effective school principal's leadership does not equate to a one man show. This suggests that for principals to become effective leaders, they need to mobilise the entire stakeholder community which may assist them to navigate the complexities of leading rural schools.

It is in the above context that the immediate challenge that principals face is to encourage more teachers to become leaders and create a support framework and provide the necessary resources to move towards team teaching and learning practices (Badenhorst & Koalepe, 2014). Teacher leadership also has a role to play in what constitutes effective school leadership and they (teachers) need to be provided with platforms within which to operationalise their leadership. In this regard it is emphasised that successful schools are led by the principals that possess necessary skills, knowledge, beliefs and values essential to improving the quality of teachers (Fusarelli & Militello, 2012). This suggests that teacher quality becomes the critical ingredient in the quest of the schools to improve academic achievement. Thus, poor teacher quality may adversely affect the quality of teaching and learning. Therefore, for schools to improve their achievement levels, rural principals need to address challenges faced by teachers and provide them with learning opportunities. Undoubtedly, one of the daunting challenges of rural school principals today is to build, sustain and support a cadre of teachers that are able to provide quality teaching and learning (Williams, 2012). Thus, in building an environment within which teachers may be successful calls for the rural school principals to understand constant contextual shifts, devise strategies and forge partnerships that respond to schools' both internal and external factors (O'Donoghue & Clarke, 2016; Williams, 2012). Remaining unaddressed, the schools' internal and external factors may constrain the effectiveness of teachers which may ultimately have serious repercussions on learner achievements. In essence, the principals need to provide professional leadership to all facets that constitute school life.

2.7.3 Leadership's nuanced contextual understandings

Furthermore, in improving the quality of education in rural schools, principals of remotely located, small rural schools need to understand the different contexts in which they lead. Such contexts may add to their leadership challenges or aggravate the ones that are prevailing (Pashiardis, Savvides, Lytra & Angelidou, 2011). School principals need to be conversant with the landscape of different rural contexts in which they operate in order to anticipate challenges they may encounter and become proactive in their approaches or devise methods commensurate with the level of complexity of such challenges. This means that for the transformation agenda to be custom-made to address unique rural school issues, it is crucial that education leaders become more familiar with the terrain of education in rural areas. Consequently, for schools with a history of poor performance to improve their teaching and

learning processes, they need to strategically invest in capacity building for school leadership, particularly the principals (Fusarelli & Militello, 2012). Wallin (2009) and Lock, Budgen and Lunay (2012) partly concur with Fusarelli and Militello (2012) when they assert that principals of rural schools require unique, customised systems of developing their leadership to suit their rural environments. This suggests that school principals, of rural schools in particular, need to be prepared for the conditions which they may encounter in contexts where they will be or are leading.

Investing in the above type of capacity building for these principals becomes one of the vehicles through which the quest of having effective leaders at the helm of rural schools may be achieved. This then may translate into these principals having the capacities to improve learner achievements in such unique contexts. Given the above discussion, it becomes clear that school principals need to be multi-dimensional in their approaches, since achieving successful development of rural areas needs synchronised approaches like enhancing the capacities of rural schools, improving the rural infrastructural capacity and promulgation of an enabling policy framework (Biriescu & Babaita, 2014). This calls for a confluence of context sensitive approaches to school improvement. To this end, to breed fertile ground for school leaders to be effective calls for the involvement of all stakeholders beyond the confines of the rural schools or rural school districts.

2.7.4 Resourcing capacities in rural schools

Rural schools need to be adequately resourced if the quest for improving learners' academic performance and the quality of education, in general, are to materialise. In America, financial constraints that schools contend with are essentially the outcome of policy formulation in all respects (Johnson & Howley, 2015). This suggests that policymakers utilise a one cap fits all approach to school funding policies. Such an approach fails to acknowledge and target the uniqueness of rural school challenges and their financial contexts, in particular. Therefore, these policies may work for one set of contexts while they do not work for other sets of contexts which ingrains the status quo in terms of resourcing disparities in rural and metropolitan schools. Schools in rural areas in the American context receive less funding from the states and the central government than their metropolitan counterparts since rural areas have a relatively lower revenue base (Williams, 2010). This state of affairs is sanctioned by/flows from policy.

Since funding plays a central role in the resourcing of schools, school funding policies need to be crafted in a manner which embraces the distinctly different rural contexts. Therefore, rural school funding needs to be brought on par with that of urban schools or rural schools need to be adequately funded on the basis of the profiles of their contexts and their immediate challenges. Bringing their funding on par with their urban counterparts may, in some cases, be counter-productive because rural schools may face challenges unique to their settings. School funding need to be married with context for it to yield desirable results in terms of improving delivery of the core business of the schools.

In a bid to narrow the school funding disparities and improve the quality of education in South Africa, school funding categorises schools into fee paying and no fee paying schools (Mestry & Berry, 2016). The former are ranked as quintiles 4 and 5 while the latter fall under quintiles 1, 2 and 3. The latter are located in poor communities including rural areas. No fee paying schools receive higher funding than the fee paying schools (Mestry & Berry, 2016). Considering that no fee paying schools in urban areas receive equal funding as the no fee paying schools in rural areas raises questions regarding the adequacy of funding in the latter. Some of the challenges facing rural schools are unique to their contexts, therefore funding that may be considered adequate for no fee paying schools in urban areas may not necessarily translate into adequate funding for no fee paying schools in rural areas. Aggravating this may be the reality that rural no fee paying schools with low enrolments still receive less funding, as it is linked to learner numbers, even though funding for no fee paying schools is higher. This culminates in financial challenges for these schools which may constrain procurement of resources critical to enhancing teaching and learning. To this end, improving rural schools may become a reality if policies are commensurate with the distinct complexities of rural schools. In South Africa, there appears to be no national, special comprehensive funding programmes seeking to improve learner performance over and above ordinary funding for all schools.

In America, there are initiatives or programmes for improving schools that are sanctioned by central government policies. These involve the recent RTT, SIG and REAP improvement programmes (Johnson & Howley, 2015). These initiatives are designed to target improvement of schools that attain poor academic results, both in rural and urban locales. This indicates that the government acknowledges that rural schools are uniquely challenged and they need additional support to navigate their challenging contexts. However, it becomes paradoxical that

such acknowledgement does not necessarily translate into the crafting of improvement initiatives that are context driven. What these poor performing schools, particularly rural, need to change in order to elevate performance levels is prescribed or pre-determined. Such prescribed, funded changes may not be applicable to all schools in this category (poor performing). This suggests that some schools may maximally benefit from these grants while some may remain untransformed due to ring-fencing and inflexibility of policies. Only those schools that coincidentally fall within the category of pre-determined set of challenges and corresponding prescribed reforms are likely to benefit from such improvement grants. Evidently, this is divorced from the immediate, day-to-day operational challenges that these schools deal with.

It is a rebuttable presumption that all poor performing rural schools contend with the similar challenges which therefore require same policy interventions. It may be in this context that in Cyprus, the community and the associations of parents support the schools by generating additional funds to enhance the schools' infrastructural capacity or arrange events for the school (Pashiardis et al., 2011). Arising from this community initiative is the question whether poor rural communities, with children in no fee paying schools, can afford to provide additional funding for their schools in a South African context. This indicates that resourcing and improving schools may require more funding than what the government ordinarily allocates to all schools. Notwithstanding these paradoxes, it becomes clear that improving the quality of rural education is gradually being prioritised on the education transformation agenda in different contexts. This becomes evident in the attempts made to recruit and retain a competent teacher workforce in rural schools (Mafora, 2013).

2.7.5 Incentivising rural teacher workforce

Teachers have a critical role to play and are instrumental in the quest to enhance the academic performance of learners. Therefore, teachers are one of the most invaluable resources in all rural schools (Mwenda & Mgomezulu, 2018; Jakubiec & Kooymans, 2013). For the school improvement programmes to materialise, amongst others, schools need to be adequately staffed, teachers in particular, commensurate with the curricula offered. It is for this reason that governments need to stem the challenge, which is a global phenomenon, of the retention of quality teachers in rural schools, in particular (Mafora, 2013). Challenges in recruiting and

retaining teachers in rural schools has escalated to global proportions with adverse impact on the quality of education, particularly in Africa (Acheampong & Gyasi, 2019; Handal, Watson, Petocz & Maher, 2018). Globally, recruiting teachers of high quality is perceived to be crucial to the future of the delivery of quality education in rural areas (Adie & Barton, 2012). This indicates that teachers are not willing to either work in rural areas or remain in such areas for longer periods for those who are already employed there. The future of rural education may hang in the balance if rural teacher recruitment constraints are not alleviated as a matter of urgency. Consequently, in some contexts, rural teacher incentives have been introduced to attract and retain teachers in rural schools (Rosenberg, Christianson & Angus, 2015). In other countries including Zambia, Gambia and Lesotho, these incentives are referred to as rural hardship allowance while in Mozambique they are called the location bonus (Chelwa, Pellicer & Maboshe, 2019; Mwenda & Mgomezulu, 2018). Teachers are incentivised for working in rural areas and incentives are also utilised to attract teachers in scarce skills or subjects like Mathematics and Science to work in these areas.

These aforesaid incentives acknowledge that the quest to improve rural schools may be achieved with a stable, quality teacher workforce not one which is characterised by high teacher turnover. The South African Department of Education has introduced the rural teacher incentive system which provides monetary allowance to qualifying teachers working in rural areas (Department of Education, 2008; Poti, Mutsvangwa & Hove, 2014). Since teachers are the vehicles through which quality education can be delivered (Poti et al., 2014), this system seeks to ensure adequate supply and retention of teachers in rural schools and improvement of rural education. Policy provides that only qualified teachers are eligible for this rural allowance (Department of Education, 2008; Poti et al., 2014). This suggests that the policy acknowledges that unqualified or under-qualified teachers may compromise the quality of education that schools in poor rural communities have to offer.

However, in some quarters, the consistency of this system may be questioned in the light of the reality that these teachers, though unqualified or underqualified, also contend with the same contextual challenges as their qualified counterparts. What aggravates this reality is that rural schools may be compelled to hire underqualified teachers because of the high turnover of qualified and experienced teachers (Badenhorst & Koalepe, 2014). It is on this wavelength that recruiting teachers who do not hold professional teaching qualifications seems to be recognised

worldwide as a means through which the shortage of teachers in rural schools can be addressed (Mukeredzi, 2016). Given this paradox, it means unqualified teachers are consciously recruited into rural schools but they are excluded from rural teacher incentives. Such a paradox flies in the face of the quest to retain teachers in rural schools. It then translates into these schools having to perpetually contend with shortages thereby threatening uninterrupted service delivery, teaching and learning. This raises questions whether this incentive scheme caters for different rural school contexts. The criteria for eligibility for this scheme includes remote and rural areas, specific subjects and circumstances that render recruitment of teachers difficult (Department of Education, 2008; Poti et al., 2014). In the absence of an agreed upon definition of rural (Roberts & Green, 2013; Myende, 2015), classifying areas may be marred by inconsistencies which may translate into exclusions in some cases. Such exclusions may culminate in either benefitting unintended beneficiaries or depriving intended beneficiaries of incentives.

In the American context, teachers are incentivised to choose schools in rural areas and remain in those schools for longer periods through programmes like, *inter alia,* SIG and REAP (Rosenberg et al., 2015). Unlike South Africa, these incentives are part of the integrated programmes designed to enhance the academic performance of poor performing rural schools. The American government realises that the approach to turning around the performance of rural schools and improving rural education needs to be holistic to target different facets of the school that affect performance. However, questions arise regarding whether these incentives are sensitive to context or they are a one size fits all. Teachers stationed in different rural school districts may face a range of different challenges including, amongst others, accommodation, transport, lack of access to quality professional development and lack of access to information and communication technologies. Divorced from context, arguably, these incentives may fail to alleviate the unique day-to-day challenges of rural teachers. For instance, monetary incentives may not address the challenge of lack of accommodation or transport for teachers who live beyond the bounds of the community where their schools are located. Other than improving the salaries or adding to monetary benefits of rural teachers, it is not clear how these incentives intend to address the unique contextual challenges of teachers. Furthermore, in South Africa, the rural teacher incentives are paid once a year (Department of Education, 2008). This scenario may fail to attract or persuade teachers to stay in rural schools if, for example,

they cannot afford to pay for accommodation or transport during the course of the year which defeats the ends of this policy intervention.

2.7.6 Networking for school improvement

Networking in rural school districts may alleviate challenges related to geographical isolation, resourcing capacities and limited professional development. Alleviating such challenges, networking may contribute towards the improvement of the academic performance of rural schools and the quality of education they offer. Networking is gradually being perceived to be a method of implementing policies, enhancing teaching practice, devising innovative approaches and creating coherence in the community and the system which is different from the traditional top down configurations of policy (Hargreaves, Parsley & Cox, 2015). Schools are clustered for networking purposes (Raggl, 2019). Education networks may afford the schools involved the opportunity to be collectively in charge of effecting and owning the changes that each of them wants to see instead of implementing changes prescribed to them which do not speak to their contexts. Networking and collaboration between poor performing and high performing schools are regarded as one of the effective methods of improving the former's performance (Muijs, 2015). This means that the latter becomes the mentors to the former.

It may be for the foregoing reason that recently systems of education in different contexts are investing substantial resources in facilitating the development of education networks and collaboration with the intention of improving low performing schools (Muijs, 2015). This suggests that in some countries, networking of schools is not casual or informal but it is formally structured and it is supported by the education authorities. For instance, in Britain, such networking initiatives include, amongst others, Federations Programme and recently Academies. In America, these networks involve, *inter alia*, Charter Schools and League of Professional Schools while in Netherlands, schools are encouraged to network with not only other schools but also community-based organisations and some state departments (Muijs, 2015). It becomes clear that education systems need to provide fertile ground and capacity for these networks to thrive. In South Africa, there does not appear to be a formally structured networking of schools which means such initiatives may exist on informal or *ad hoc* basis.

In a study conducted in rural schools in England, findings suggested that networking was crucial for rural contexts to enhance access to resources and improve low performing schools (Muijs, 2015). This indicates that networking schools are able to pool their resources to mitigate under-resourcing or bolster their resourcing capacities which may ultimately enhance the quality of teaching and learning processes. Therefore, networking may enable the partnering schools to deal with their context-embedded challenges and issues. By virtue of the geographical location of the rural schools, rural teachers also have to contend with professional isolation which constrains access to continuing professional development. With the appropriate support and resources, professionally isolated rural teachers without access or with limited access to traditional district support are exposed to professional networks that bridge isolation gaps (Hargreaves, Parsley & Cox, 2015). These professional networks may become platforms for dissemination of professional capital, collective professional engagements, debates on current educational discourses, discussion of the implementation of policies and educational changes and innovations of practice. Therefore, it may be in these platforms that rural teachers are able to receive critical professional development which they may otherwise not receive or be limited by the physical distance between the schools and the districts. Networking may prevent the schools from being relegated to the periphery of educational practice. Such relegation may compromise the quality of teaching and learning and ultimately render these schools irrelevant in the face of failing to fulfil their mandates.

In some quarters, the rationale for professional networking focuses on revolutionising "future practice" instead of cascading what is currently considered "best practice" (Campbell, Lieberman & Yashkina, 2015). Such focus may impact positively on learner academic achievements. Furthermore, schools in rural areas are geographically isolated which may render networking an impossible dream or, in some instances, an episodic activity. To avoid episodic networking, education systems, districts and education leaders need to support such initiatives (networking) as their support has reportedly been crucial to the success of such initiatives (Hadfield & Chapman, 2009; Hargreaves, Parsley & Cox, 2015). Moreover, networking objectives and undertakings need to be clearly defined if it is to be effective (Duffy & Gallagher, 2017). Haphazardly organised networking operations are unlikely to be sustainable and effective. A study conducted by Muijs (2015) suggests that schools may be incentivised as a way of encouraging them to network in cases where physical distance is a challenge or lack of working relationship in what may be perceived as culturally diverse rural areas. Incentives may be in monetary terms or in the form of brokering a working relationship

between schools and districts. Supporting these school network initiatives may enhance their sustainability and capacitate them as one of the vehicles through which lack of resources, limited professional development and poor academic performance may be counteracted. Notwithstanding the above, networking is not a cure-all or a universal remedy for performance challenges that rural schools are faced with. Professional networking practices may only flourish within particular conditions like, amongst others, understandings of the contextual dynamics of the schools involved and the prevalence of acceptable levels of trust (Duffy & Gallagher, 2016). To this end, education networks do not automatically translate into improved academic performance.

2.8 Leadership and identity

Teachers, including principals, construct multiple identities which constantly evolves across spatiality and temporality (Miller, 2009). There is no single, fixed teacher identity. The fluid nature of identity finds its expression from its unending evolution traversing through space and time. Space and its implications for the process of construction of principal (teacher) identities accentuate how contextual influences shape and are shaped by principal identities (Trent, 2015). Given this, leadership identities are multiple, subjectively constructed and re-constructed and may change through interactions within and between personal, work and policy and with contexts (Bradbury & Gunter, 2006). Teacher (principal) identity is a representation of the medium through which principals define themselves to themselves and to others (Day, 2011; Lasky, 2005). How principals describe who they are to the personal selves and those around them, including other principals, teachers, School Governing Body and parents constitutes their core identities. Though identity is partially a social construction, the process that underlies becoming and being a teacher is also profoundly personal (Trent, 2015). Further, identity construction of a teacher draws on the teacher's life story and his/her unique skills, knowledge and attitudes (Miller, 2009). In this case, this suggests that what constitutes principal identity are the personal and professional domains of self which are not mutually exclusive since these two domains mutually influence each other (Beauchamp and Thomas, 2009). Other than only being components of their active construction of their identities, the experiences of teachers can also be of imposed identities stemming from how society or culture conceive teachers (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009). This suggests that identity construction becomes an interplay between enablers and inhibitors (Trent, 2015) within the environment which principals find themselves. The contextual dynamics can either be enablements or

constraints in the construction of identity journey. It is in this vein that the leadership identities construction is a negotiated journey.

What takes centre stage in the contemporary understandings of identities is agency that acknowledges that teachers are active participants in their own professional development (Trent, 2015). It is the agency of the principals themselves that sustain the urge to be actively involved in the professional activities aligned with their identities. For instance, if principals ensure attendance (agency) of and participation in workshops and seminars focusing on school leadership (professional development) indicates that they identify with leadership. Consequently, it is argued that "identification takes place in the doing" (Wenger, 1998, p. 193). Principal identities manifest themselves in their day to day leadership practices.

There are three key facets of principals' identities. Firstly, principals compound professional identities as influenced by gender, class, race, biography, cultural factors and their values, attributes, attitudes and aspirations for practice and practices themselves (Burke & Stets, 2009). It is the sum total of all these internal and external factors that contribute to making principals' identities whole. Next, is the existing intense dynamics interaction between identity, realm of educational practice, schools and their communities as primary sites of engagement by principals. This characterises the constant interplay between identities, micro-level and macro-level school environments. In enacting their leadership, principals' identities interact with, inter alia, policy environments and socioeconomic backgrounds of their school communities. Lastly, the principals' emotional awareness and management which are essential dimensions regarding relative stability or instability of their identities (Burke & Stets, 2009). What underpins the stability or volatility of the principals' identities is their level of awareness regarding their emotions. To manifest a stable identity school principals need to acknowledge, understand and manage not only their emotions but also those of their teachers, amongst others.

2.9 Chapter conclusion

In this review of literature, how school principals lead schools in different contexts and how they enact their leadership practices in such contexts were examined. School principals need to appreciate that in the realm of educational practice there has been a shift from deficiency narrative to strengths-orientated narrative regarding how rurality and rural schools are understood. Notwithstanding this shift, this chapter highlighted a diverse range of challenges that rural schools still face; challenges unique to their contexts. Also, literature reveals that

there are schools that are perceived to be successful despite their distinct day-to-day operational challenges. Further, the making of decontextualised policies was discussed and how it affects the quest to change the destinies of rural schools, in particular. The chapter also discussed how teaching and learning may be promoted in rural schools particularly in the wake of their day-to-day actualities. Lastly, this chapter presented who the principals leading schools are, how they construct their identities *vis-à-vis* their day to day leadership practices. It became clear that context-embedded principals' leadership practices and context-sensitive educational policy interventions are most likely to bring about much-needed transformation of rural education. Such practices and policies need to acknowledge that rural communities have the capacity that they can exploit to change their own livelihoods and that of their schools.

The next chapter presents the theoretical framework within which this study is framed.

CHAPTER THREE

THE FRAME OF THE THEORETICAL EYEPIECE

3.1 Introduction

Chapter Two presented the review of literature regarding the dynamics of leading schools in rural contexts. It presented the review of principals' leadership practices and contexts within which such practices unfold and the gradual shift from the deficit narratives of rurality to capacity-based understandings of rurality. The chapter also discussed the context-embedded challenges that rural schools contend with and schools that are successful irrespective of their challenging environments. Further, the chapter highlighted the decontextualised nature of education policies and how learning is promoted in schools located in rural settings.

This chapter focuses on the theoretical framework within which this study is framed. Underpinning this study is a trilogy of theories involving social identity theory (SIT), theory of rurality (TR) and servant leadership theory (SLT). The presentation of the theoretical framework involves how this study is framed within this assemblage of theories. To remind the reader, the research puzzles (research questions) that inform the study are as follows:

The main research puzzle is:

- What are the lived experiences of principals leading primary schools in rural contexts?

This will be addressed by the following sub-questions:

- Who are the principals leading primary schools in rural contexts?
- What meanings and understandings do the principals draw on in their leadership of rural primary schools?
- What are the day-to-day leadership practices of these principals of rural primary schools?

Subsequent to presenting SIT highlighting the nature of this theory and the four components of SIT embracing social categorisation, social comparison, social identity and self-esteem; the TR will be discussed with the main focus on rurality as context, forces (space, place and time), agencies (movement, systems and will) and resources (situated, material and psychological).

Thereafter, SLT and its essential characteristics will be dealt with involving listening, empathy, healing, awareness, persuasion, conceptualisation, foresight, stewardship, commitment to growth of others and building communities. Concluding this chapter will be the integrative discussion of these three theories as a theoretical lens of understanding this study.

3.2 Coming to grips with theory choice

"Qualitative researchers value theory as an overarching perspective assisting in attempts to integrate diverse findings and thoughts thereby coordinating and orchestrating our growing sense of richness of meaning" (de Vos, Strydom, Fouche & Delport, 2011, p. 313). This suggests that the theory provides all-encompassing lenses through which a study may be analysed and understood to enhance meanings. It structures and unfolds the sense-making process of the phenomena that are being researched. It is in this vein that I had to find a theoretical framework that fits the purpose. Initially, I considered Complexity Leadership Theory and Instructional Leadership Theory. However, after intense scrutiny of these theories, I realised that they would not be fit for purpose in this research project. It dawned on me that it was a daunting task to find a framework fit for the study. After a number of engagements with my peers at PhD level and my supervisor regarding the focus and purpose of the study, I concluded that this study needed three theories which are: social identity theory (SIT), theory of rurality (TR) and servant leadership theory (SLT). These theories provide an overarching perspective that will enhance the sense-making process of the phenomenon being studied; which is the dynamics of leading in rural contexts. SIT deals with who these school principals leading in rural contexts are while TR deals with the context within which the participant schools are located. Lastly, SLT deals with principals' leadership practices. Clearly, these theories cover the research puzzles which are also included in the themes presented in the previous chapter.

3.3 Social Identity Theory (SIT)

People classify themselves and others as members of various social groups (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Social groups refer to groups of individuals who regard themselves as belonging to the same social group or share common group identity attributes (Stets & Burke, 2000) and they are perceived to be part of a group by other people (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). SIT therefore focuses on the "the group in the individual", as belonging to a social group and defines part of the self (Trepte, 2006, p. 255). This means SIT foregrounds social groups not individuals. In

essence, the social group to which an individual belongs describes who the individual is relative to the descriptive characteristics of that social group. Therefore, being a member of a social group and the value one places on such membership is referred to as social identity (Trepte, 2006). Knowing that one belongs to a particular social group or groups constitutes social identity. Perceiving oneself as "belonging" within a group of individuals is social identification. For the participant school principals, being members of the South African Principals' Association gives them social identification. During the course of their lifetime, individuals become members of distinctive amalgamation of social groups, hence their unique self-concept that is constituted by a set of social identities (Stets & Burke, 2000). School principals assume membership of a range of social groups during the course of their personal and professional lives which ultimately influence their self-concept that, in itself, embraces a range of their social identities.

3.3.1 Social categorisation

Simplifying their understanding of their worlds and structuring their interaction with such worlds, people classify individuals into social groups (Trepte, 2006). Social categorisation is perceived as a cognitive instrument that classifies and orders the society thereby regulates the behaviour of individuals. It is through such categorisation that the space of an individual in the society is made and defined (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). This suggests that people belong to different groups which then translates into a structured society. Preceding individuals are social groups since people affiliate into already existing social groups in structured society (Stets & Burke, 2000). This means that these social groups that individuals become members of, are components of a structured society and they exist in relative contrast to other groups. It is in this context that Stryker (1980) recognises that people define themselves on the basis of meanings communicated to them by the structured society they are born into. Teachers who are members of what are perceived as yellow unions may define themselves as non-radical based on the perceptions conveyed to them by SADTU and her allied forces. Given this, people view their world from the vantage points of their group membership. Such "belongingness" become the lenses through which their reality and that of others is understood. This clearly anchors and demarcates the place of an individual in society. The school principals, as individuals, are affiliated to different social groups. Such affiliations are assumed to affect or influence their behaviour and actions at their schools and in various contexts.

On the basis of the categorisation of groups, prevalent differences between social groups (in-groups and out-groups) are highlighted and emphasised while the differences amongst the membership of the same in-group is downplayed or moderated (Trepte, 2006). Individuals who are similar to oneself are classified with the self and become the in-group while individuals who are not congruent with oneself are classified as the out-group (Stets & Burke, 2000). The group that one identifies oneself with, is one's in-group while the group that one does not identify oneself with is the out-group. Flowing from this is that individuals define and understand themselves through being affiliates of social groups (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Ashforth & Mael, 1989). If the school principals identify themselves with or are members of the South African Democratic Teachers' Union (SADTU), SADTU becomes their in-group while other teacher unions are viewed as out-groups. Being school principals in rural contexts does not necessarily translate into these principals belonging to the same in-groups. They may be members of different or same social groups at different times. By virtue of the existence of different social groups, differences epitomise the essence of the uniqueness of such groups. However, this does not translate into absence of differences within in-groups as, if they exist, they are relegated to the background.

Sharing of social categories by the entire membership of the social group serves as a social stereotype. Such stereotypes assist with interpretation, explanation and justification of the behaviours of individuals (Tajfel, 1981). This suggests that the group attributes shape the thoughts and perspectives of all members in the group. How the group defines and sets itself apart from others becomes a repository of stereotypes that premise how members rationalise their day-to-day actions. As social beings, we all belong to different social groups though such groups are not accorded the same level of importance simultaneously. Membership of a social group needs to be noticeable so that it induces or triggers behaviour commensurate with the group's social identity (Tajfel, 1979). Prone to be noticeable is the membership of a group if the differences between social groups are starkly highlighted (Oakes, 1987). Though salience of membership prompts the members to adhere to what the identity of the group prescribes in terms of behaviour; individuals may place different value to different social groups at different times subject to various contexts. What then cements group membership is the salient flagging of the inter-group differences. The value these school principals may place on social groups may vary however, as members they need to act in a manner that is congruent to the identity framework of their groups.

3.3.2 Social comparison

SIT supposes that individuals do not only classify themselves and others but they also evaluate their social groups (Trepte, 2006). Consequently, defining and understanding the self and others are mainly "relational and comparative" since one defines oneself in relation to individuals in other social groups (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). Social groups are thus characterised by cognitive, evaluative and emotional components (Tajfel, 1979). Individuals need to understand that they are members of a group (cognitive) which can be evaluated positively or negatively (evaluative) thereby resulting in positive or negative self-esteem (emotional). The school principals who choose to be members of the South African Democratic Teachers Union (SADTU) evaluate their union and other teacher unions and their behaviour on the basis of their (unions') identity attributes which affects how they view or understand themselves. SIT maintains that once group identity is salient, the behaviour of individuals corresponds with the group attributes which enhances the evaluation of the group (in-group). This subsequently enhances the individual members' evaluation of the self (Stets & Burke, 2000). In this vein, intra-group and intergroup comparison affect how the school principals perceive their leadership. One of the behaviours that social categorisation induces is social comparison. Thus, defining the space of an individual in a structured society involves comparative evaluation of social categorisations relative to other social groups (Trepte, 2006). In its very nature, categorising involves comparing as individuals categorise the self and others into groups and they compare the value of existing groups before they could assume membership. School principals as leaders in rural settings, which categorise them into social groups, may compare themselves with other principals in different rural and urban contexts. The results of their comparison may inform their rural leadership terrain.

Ascertaining whether one's group has inferior or superior status and how significant membership of such group is, individuals compare their group with other groups in terms of attributes and returns (Trepte, 2006). It is important for members to know the social ranking of their groups as it may determine the value they place in such groups based on the benefits they enjoy. This suggests that individuals may not want to be associated with groups that occupy the lower rung of the social ladder as it may affect how they understand themselves and others. Comparing themselves with the groups of principals in other rural contexts, these school principals can be made aware of the lower or higher status attached to their groups. This subsequently determines whether member principals retain membership of their current

groups. In SIT, social comparison intends to appraise individuals' social groups and those of others however, such comparison involves groups that are compatible to the individual's group in terms of attributes and characteristics (Trepte, 2006). This comparison does not occur in a vacuum since group members only compare the comparable on the basis of given group qualities. Comparing the incomparable may render the social comparison irrelevant and void of any subtantiveness and impact on group status. The more compatible other social groups are to individuals regarding facets of the competition, the more pertinent comparison becomes and the desire to have positive results (Trepte, 2006). Compatibility of groups validates the impact that social comparison may have on the groups, whether lower or higher. The groups of principals as leaders of public schools in rural contexts cannot compare their groups with that of the principals as leaders of private schools in urban contexts. These groups are irreconcilable. The identity and attributes of their group may vary. Furthermore, the group of principals of public primary schools and secondary schools in rural contexts may be incompatible in terms of pertinent competition dimensions. Such incongruities are further starkly highlighted by the reality that rural contexts are not homogenous.

Social identity and the individual self-esteem are mainly decided by effects of social comparisons (Trepte, 2006). Social comparison is premised on the following: adoption of membership and identifying with one's group, suitable context for social comparison and out-groups need to be pertinent in terms of close compatibility (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Hinkle & Brown, 1990). Ultimately, the social identity and self-esteem, whether negative or positive, are constituted by the consequences of social comparisons. The prerequisite for individuals to be able to, pertinently, compare themselves to other groups is to assume membership of a particular group. Therefore, assumption of group membership renders comparison meaningful. For the principals to have positive self-esteem, they need to have positive social identity hence membership with the appropriate group is critical.

3.3.3 Social identity

The component of one's self-image that emanates from the understanding of one's social group or groups membership and the value one places on such membership is referred to as social identity (Tajfel, 1978). In this vein, this identity is determined by the effects of social comparisons amongst in-groups and related out-groups. Deriving from such identification is the behaviour and activities that are consistent with the group identity, sustaining of structures

that characterise this identity and stereotyping of self and others (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). Consequently, Stets and Burke (2000) concur with Hogg, Terry and White (1995), in stating that, cognitively, social identity prescribes and describes the qualities that members should subscribe to. This prescription involves shaping members' thoughts to align them with the perspectives, feelings and behaviour of their group. For instance, SADTU members may perceive teachers who are non-members of SADTU as members of yellow unions that are either not progressive or relatively not radical in their approach to educational issues. Yellow unions are trade unions that are established or influenced by employers (Garnero, 2018). This typifies stereotyping of oneself and others based on prescriptions and descriptions emanating from SADTU identity. Though SADTU is the majority teacher union in South Africa, there are other teacher unions like National Teachers' Union (NATU), National Professional Teachers' Organisation of South Africa (NAPTOSA), amongst others (Khumalo, 2019; Zengele, 2013). School principals are socially categorised and identified as leaders. How these leaders think about or view themselves may not be detached from, for example, their membership of the group of public primary school principals and how important they regard such a group. Based on their social identity, membership of the group holds and displays uniformed perceptions and actions. Such uniformed perceptions or convictions manifest themselves in different ways and in different facets of an individual principal's life which may be cognitively, through attitudes and behaviours. In the wake of changing performance and status of the social groups, social comparisons become a perpetual phenomenon with social identity becoming flexible and open-ended (Trepte, 2006). To this end, social categories are not permanent; their distinguishing characteristics and their relationship with other social categories does not remain static (Hogg & Adams, 1988). Given the above, the individuals' urge to acquire and maintain positive social identity constantly evolves. Of critical importance to individual members of groups, is to attain positive social identity.

The status of social groups is informed by the social comparisons. If such comparisons are continuous, so are the social identities of school principals. This is influenced by the reality that the principals' social groups do not remain stagnant in terms of their performance and subsequently their status. Thus, constant evolution of these social groups, their distinct attributes and their rapport with other groups is inevitable as they (social categories) are not everlasting. This suggests that social groups have their own belief systems regarding the nature of relationships between one in-group and other pertinent out-groups which legitimise intergroup relations and possible change from one group to the other. It is on this basis that

Tajfel and Turner (1979) conceived various belief systems and related approaches utilised to maintain or stay within a positive social identity trajectory. These are social mobility and social change (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). In social mobility, if one's group is accorded inferior social status, one may leave one's group for another with more superior status. This indicates that group membership is also not everlasting. Retention of group membership by member principals is subject to the nature of the current status of the group. Social change is adopted in a case where social mobility is not applicable. Social change involves social competition and social creativity (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). The former involves comparing one's group with a group with more inferior status to highlight the in-group's higher social status on related facets of comparison. The latter engages the reconfiguring of the attributes and values related to the inferior status attributes, concentrating on other aspects of comparison or shifting to comparison with other groups. This indicates that groups do not always compare themselves to groups with equivalent or higher status than theirs. Unable to compete with their equal counterparts, the principals' in-groups may resort to competing with other principals' out-groups that are perceived to be no match for the in-group regarding pertinent facets of comparison. Alternatively, groups may modify or downplay the significance attached to the inferior attributes to their advantage in order to cushion the impact of such inferior status comparison elements. Furthermore, member principals may invoke social mobility option by applying for transfers to other schools if their groups are perceived to have low status in relation to other groups or associate themselves with groups in another circuit or district.

3.3.4 Self-esteem

Motivation that underlies inter-group behaviour is self-esteem (Trepte, 2006). People constantly make every effort to endorse the components they use to define the self (Trepte, 2006). With regard to SIT, the quest for positive self-esteem is fulfilled when an individual's group is evaluated positively (Turner, Brown & Tajfel, 1979). This suggests that being members of a group is driven by the quest to enhance one's self-esteem. It is in this regard that members themselves ratify what they perceive to characterise the definition of the self. Positive feedback emanating from social comparisons become crucial building blocks towards improving or maintaining an individual's self-esteem. Critical to an individual's self-image is membership of a social group therefore positive social comparisons translate into positive social identity which in turn improves self-esteem (Trepte, 2006). Positive inter-group comparison results to enhanced self-esteem while low self-esteem amplifies out-group

comparison (Abrams & Hogg, 1988). Having their group evaluated positively augments the self-esteem of member school principals. Their self-esteem, whether positive or negative, may influence their leadership practices. In my view, school principals with low self-esteem are most unlikely to initiate and manage change in their schools in the face of, amongst others, resistance. Negative self-esteem may intensify out-group comparison when the member principals search for groups with positive social identity in a bid to salvage their self-esteem. This indicates that, for these member school principals, positive self-esteem is one of the coveted ultimate prize to receive for being a member of a social group.

In SIT, self-esteem is referred to as the esteem within which particular images of the self are contained (Hogg & Abrams, 1990). However, self-esteem is not the only and always the motive for intergroup comparisons as there are other rival needs to be satisfied through inter-group comparisons and the developing of positive social identification (Hogg & Abrams, 1990). Self-esteem is deemed to be the sum total of one's images about oneself constituted by both intrapersonal and interpersonal (through groups) feedback about oneself. Nonetheless, other than self-esteem, school principals also have other needs to satisfy with intragroup and intergroup appraisals. Besides the self-esteem, the school principals may assume membership of groups in order to be exposed to constant professional development, particularly commensurate with leading in rural contexts. Self-esteem is perceived to be the end product indicating that an individual has satisfied the quest to know more about himself or herself (Trepte, 2006). Notwithstanding the above, self-esteem could be one out of multiple drives and consequences of various group behaviours (Hogg & Abrams, 1990). Amongst others, group behaviours involving comparisons give birth to self-esteem. Though this (self-esteem) constitutes a facet of the self, it suggests that understanding their selves in relation to others and other groups and subsequently their leadership terrain partly emanate from being members of the groups.

3.4 Theory of Rurality

This theory conceptualises rurality as a dynamic and generative space with transformative agency which considers or is affected by the lived experiences and the dynamic variables that enable or disable transformation in rural contexts (Balfour, Mitchell & Moletsane, 2008). It highlights the interplay between the dynamic variables of forces (space, place and time), agencies (movement, systems and will) and resources (situated, material and psychosocial)

which, despite being also found in urban locales, are nonetheless uniquely experienced in rural settings (Balfour, Mitchell & Moletsane, 2008). These variables may become drivers or inhibitors of transformation in rural contexts. Such an interplay characterises the relationship between space, time and agency in rural settings and the capacity of the rural communities to sustain themselves both as individuals and as agents that are able to resist or transform their own environment based on the resources available (Balfour, Mitchell & Moletsane, 2008). Therefore, these dynamic drivers are able to revolutionise or stunt change and development in such rural contexts. This dispels the notion of incapacity and helplessness of rural communities and the deficit image or understanding of their contexts. In light of the above, this section mainly focuses on rurality as context, forces (space, place and time), agencies (movement, systems and will) and resources (situated, material and psychosocial).

3.4.1 Rurality as context

The adversities that the urban contexts contend with may be, in some instances, similar to those in rural settings however, what uniquely characterises the adversities in rural contexts is their intensity in such contexts (Balfour, Mitchell & Moletsane, 2008). On the one hand, though urban settings also contend with socioeconomic challenges but these are mitigated by the reality that there are better support services and infrastructural development. On the other hand, in rural contexts, such support services are either unavailable or not accessible to the people who need them the most due to distance and transport constraints and general marginalisation (Balfour, Mitchell & Moletsane, 2008). To access the critical social services, communities in rural contexts have to traverse difficult terrains in time and distance which fundamentally epitomises the intensity of the challenges in such contexts. The intensity of the adversities in rural and urban contexts highlights the difference which may determine accessibility or inaccessibility to social services, how long it takes to access such services or the pace at which transformation may take place. For some families therefore, it may be impossible to access social grants thereby rendering it difficult for them to buy, amongst others, school uniform and pay for educational excursions. Further, the school principals' quest to improve the academic performance of learners may become a futile exercise, if for some learners the last meal of the day is that which they receive at school through the school nutrition programme. Such learners may not be able to concentrate on completion of homework tasks crucial for reinforcement of work covered in class. Such state of affairs may be aggravated by the lack of infrastructural development or capacity in these contexts. Teachers may be required to attend professional

development workshops at the circuit or district office. However, due to unavailability or limited availability of transport or unavailability of money (from school coffers) to pay for such transport, it may not always be possible to access these workshops or it may become impossible to access these workshops for some rural schools. In real life, quintile one schools may not be able to fund transport for teachers who have to attend workshops due to unavailability or limited availability of funds since such schools are declared the poorest. Consequently, crucial to the understanding of the constraints and the efficacy of the agency of rural communities is the access to resources (Balfour, Mitchell & Moletsane, 2008). The level of intensity of the resource accessibility challenges determines the extent to which the action of the community, in a bid to alleviate their plight, becomes effective or ineffective.

If rurality is conceptualised as "whatever is left" after urban has been defined, it becomes a deficient, passive and static and a marginalised periphery. Such discourse may relegate the identity of individuals in rural communities to oblivion as this discourse disempowers. This feeds into the discourse that does not conceptualise rurality as a generative and dynamic space with status and capacity independent of urban effects or properties (Balfour, Mitchell & Moletsane, 2008). In the South African context, people migrate from rural to urban locations for different reasons but they remain strongly connected to their rural communities (Balfour, Mitchell & Moletsane, 2008). This means that rurality also constitutes their identities. Living in urban centres while maintaining a strong bond with rurality constitutes neither a deficit nor a conflict between urbanity and rurality (Balfour, Mitchell & Moletsane, 2008). Migration from rural to urban and from urban to rural is a two-way movement that is dynamic and fluid. People moving to rural areas, for example, may migrate with a different strain of agency that may contribute to transformation of the rural contexts. Given the dynamic nature of the movement between urban and rural, it is argued that the very essence of rural is precisely its distribution from the dynamic drivers existing as potential enablers in the address of rurality challenges (Balfour, Mitchell & Moletsane, 2008). This movement is not a one-way to metropolitan areas but it is a two-way movement to and from urban or rural locales affected by three variables. These variables are forces, agencies and resources.

3.4.2 Forces: Space, Place and Time

This dynamic variable of forces is both centripetal and centrifugal. It embraces the movement of people from rural settings to urban areas (centrifugal) and back from urban areas to rural areas (centripetal) (Balfour, Mitchell & Moletsane, 2008). This movement is not tantamount to or not compatible with permanent out-migration since people do return to their rural communities. Some school principals may commute on a daily basis from urban areas where they live to rural areas where they work, some may be residents of the communities where their schools are located while others may rent accommodation in the vicinity of their schools' location. The latter may include those who cannot afford to travel on a daily basis who prefer to go home over weekends or at the end of the month when they get paid. For both those who are residents and those who are commuters, transport may still be a challenge. Such a challenge may compromise these principals' effectiveness in leading their schools. For rural communities, migration to the cities is fuelled by, amongst others, the quest for better jobs or educational opportunities. For those people who leave and return, rural areas therefore remain their centres that hold their cultural and social capital to which they pledge their allegiance (Balfour, Mitchell & Moletsane, 2008). Returning to their rural communities, people demonstrate where their loyalties lie. Such a demonstration suggests an expression of a conviction that their rural environments are not deficient peripheries which are beyond transformable though their space is challenged.

The dynamic activities within space as habitus take place between and within rural and urban locations with their capacity and potential to formulate and re-negotiate identities (Balfour, Mitchell & Moletsane, 2008). The essence of people's identities cannot be confined to rural as leaving rural for urban may be a return journey through which identities are constructed and re-constructed against the backdrop of experiences of both worlds (rural and urban). For instance, part of the identities of school principals who commute from urban to rural and from rural to urban every day or on weekends or month-ends may not be rigidly confined to either rural or urban. Given this scenario, individuals' identities cannot be narrowed and classified as purely urban or purely rural since that may distort or exclude some components that should constitute such identities. People who still have a strong bond with their rural folks define rural as their home which is the custodian of their cultural capital and where their loyalties should lie though they also have working lives and identities in urban areas (Balfour, Mitchell & Moletsane, 2008). The very same school principals who travel from their urban homes to their

rural schools may have out-migrated from the same communities where their schools are situated or from other rural communities where they previously lived or worked. Their allegiance to their rural communities may find expression in leading schools in such areas.

Defining a sense of place, Budge (2004) distinguishes six habits, namely: connectedness, development of identity culture, interdependence with the land, spirituality, ideology and politics and activism and engagement. The sense of belonging to a place connects people to that place and its people thereby associating themselves with an evolving cultural identity. This suggests that culture is not static therefore, cultural identity cannot remain stagnant. Hence Balfour, Mitchell and Moletsane (2008) posit that rural, as space and place, constitutes the locus for people with connection to their rural folks. Such cultural connectedness has a role to play in the mutual relationship between people and their land and how land ownership is viewed, particularly in rural locales. Sense of place embraces the people's religious identity and their political ideologies which may be mirrored within the school community. In this regard, sense of place needs to become the people's driving edge for the quest to change their livelihoods for the better instead of waiting to be rescued. Schools also have a sense of place as they belong to the communities where they are located. The movement in space is two way, inside and outside, which does not translate to rural centres being reliant on the urban centres. This happens because the individuals' return to their locus is physical and on the basis of their identity allegiance to the peripheralised rural centres (Balfour, Mitchell & Moletsane, 2008). This refutes the narrative that rural locales are in constant need of external rescue missions which depicts them as helpless despite their unexploited potential capacities.

People physically leave and return to the rural areas because they choose to maintain their strong links with their communities in rural settings. Therefore, movement in space may be reciprocal. The space-movement within rural settings is dependent upon variables which may be perceived as constraints or catalytic agents. The movement between the rural and urban areas to which individuals have links translate into employed adults, in the main, being away from their families whose return is usually experienced through money, goods and services brought home from the city (Balfour, Mitchell & Moletsane, 2008). This suggests that though some rural people are employed in the cities, they still give their places (rural milieu) a vote of confidence. It is in that vote of confidence in their rural settings that individual agency resides. Some people live and work in the rural areas so they move or travel from one rural area to the next. Movement in space takes place within and beyond the bounds of the place (rural setting).

Starkly characterising rurality is the time it takes for people to move from one area to another in space (Balfour, Mitchell & Moletsane, 2008). Gallagher (1979) posits that space is not only a modified or an adapted and organisational concept in rurality discourse but it is also characterised by its potential to impact on time, positively or negatively, as it shortens or prolongs time. Space may fast track or slow down development in rural communities. Thus, mitigating space realities, some teachers and principals, from urban and within rural communities, may even decide to rent accommodation next to or in the vicinity of the schools where they are employed. Prolonging of time impacts on the individuals' identities as they are mainly constructed against the background of communities which are comparatively isolated in terms of space and time with isolation from urban locations being greater (Balfour, Mitchell & Moletsane, 2008). Given this reality, even if the principals and teachers rent accommodation in the communities where their schools are located, it may still be a challenge, in terms of space and time, to reach the venues for professional development workshops. Such a challenge may be aggravated if the workshops are held in urban centres which may generally be far away from schools. This requires these teachers and principals to modify or re-configure their agency according to given challenge specifications.

3.4.3 Agencies: Movement, Systems and Will

Chiefly characterising the agencies is the ability to alter the relationship between the forces of space, place and time (Balfour, Mitchell & Moletsane, 2008). This suggests that agency rebuts the narrative that people living in rural areas are victims, stagnant and cannot survive without foreign intervention. Agency also rebuts, in particular, the script that schools and principals leading schools located in rural communities are helpless, with their sustainability dependent on constant external intervention. Agency may mitigate the intensity of the impact of the forces of space, place and time regarding how the principals lead their schools. On the one hand, the interplay between forces and agencies varies in urban settings because space and time are shrunk or shortened through technology and shorter distances between places (Amin, 1999). On the other hand, in rural settings the physical distance between places changes the relationship between space and time thereby regulating the degree to which space and time need agency in order to be adapted or have proximities between them narrowed or reduced (Balfour, Mitchell & Moletsane, 2008). The infrastructural development in urban centres alleviates space and time constraints which results in varying interaction between forces and agencies. This may determine the type of agency required in each instance and for that agency

to respond directly to the forces at play. The physical distances between the places determines the extent to which space and time require agencies in order to be mitigated effectively to the benefit of the schools, particularly the principals. This means that the school principals in particular and other stakeholders in general, need to understand the effects of space and time on their school operations. Understanding these effects, the school principals need to operationalise their agency commensurate with the extent to which these forces affect their schools. The physical distance from social services impact on the time people take to access the places where these services are located. This changes the relationship between people in terms of space and contexts these people traverse with the intention to access these social support services (Balfour, Mitchell & Moletsane, 2008). This suggests that for some people these social services like hospitals and clinics may not be immediately accessible or may be totally inaccessible.

To this end, it has been argued that the effectiveness of the intervention rests on it being conceptualised to be fundamentally localised (Porter, 2001). This means that rural communities need to be able to translate such intervention into tangible action. For agency to be relevant and able to transform the livelihoods of rural communities and their schools, it needs to be home-grown or at least be inspired by home-grown initiatives. Parachuted intervention may fail to target the contextual realities of these communities and their schools. School principals need to ensure that their school transformation initiatives are context-sensitive. Decontextualized initiatives are most likely to miss the target thereby maintain the status quo in rural schools. In rural settings, space and movement are not adaptable to the same degree as it could occur in urban localities which triggers the question about what drives transformation in the former settings (Balfour, Mitchell & Moletsane, 2008). Agencies could also involve community agencies like tribal authority, state agencies like health services or individuals' agencies to transform or remain stagnant, apply intervention or withdrawal, pursue centrifugal or centripetal movement (Balfour, Mitchell & Moletsane, 2008). School principals need to take cognisance of the reality that the level of adaptability of space and movement in rural and urban locales varies. Therefore, it becomes critical that the transformation agenda that principals lead in rural schools is context-driven. This may materialise if the school principals synergise all agencies at their disposal and align them with the vision of the schools.

Agency is viewed as "compliance and disruption, activism and entropy" which embraces the individuals' or communities' application of will towards both opposite ends of the continuum

(Balfour, Mitchell & Moletsane, 2008, p. 101). Agency demands that, in their quest to transform their livelihoods, the rural communities commit themselves to breaking the shackles of the perception that rural settings are unprogressive and helpless. Breaking the shackles of these negative perceptions disrupts the prevalent status quo with the ultimate intention to exploit the capacities and strengths of rural areas to their own benefit. This phenomenon gradually changes the prevalent "unprogressive and helpless narrative" about rural localities. Generally, on one end of the continuum, rurality is perceived negatively, as stagnant and backward amongst others, and therefore it is perceived to be in constant need of foreign assistance to alleviate its plight (Balfour, Mitchell & Moletsane, 2008). On the other end of the continuum, rural locales have the capacity to transform from within which impacts on the teachers and the communities' urge to transform (Balfour, Mitchell & Moletsane, 2008). Failing to invoke local agency, involving parents, teachers, school principals, learners and the community, may mean that its potential remains untapped which translates to exclusion of the crucial role player (agency) in the transformation agenda. Contrary to the forces which deal with how space and time adapt each other based on the movement of individuals from one place to another (in space), agency is applied with regard to the bid to modify space and time (Balfour, Mitchell & Moletsane, 2008). Corresponding with the concept of agency, in this regard, is the concept of habitus (Balfour, Mitchell & Moletsane, 2008) which refers to the socialised structure of resilient and changeable qualities.

Responding to the determining structures like family or level of education and other external factors they interact with, the individual agents develop changeable and long-lasting qualities (Balfour, Mitchell & Moletsane, 2008). These dispositions are neither a consequence of free will nor exclusively dictated by these determining structures but they are borne out of an interplay between both over a period of time. Like forces, they may be concurrently external and internal (Balfour, Mitchell & Moletsane, 2008). These structures ingrain dispositions that affect the nature, scope and capacity of agency. Agency needs to mitigate the realities of space and time within the context in which they exist. Given the above, agency is affected by the interplay of factors like the socioeconomic status of the community, family backgrounds, level of education and other factors beyond the bounds of the community. For instance, a fundraising event in a quintile five ex-Model C school in an urban environment may attract bigger audiences including residents who do not have learners at that school. The school is more likely to raise revenue that is relatively higher than the revenue which may be raised by a rural quintile one school. Such a scenario may be a confirmation of the influence of "transposable

dispositions" on individual agency. This suggests that agency needs to be preceded by the change in the habitus of individuals as it influences how they view their agency and why they invoke such agency. It is for this reason that in operationalising their agency to transform the schools, the principals need to involve learners, parent community and the local education office (circuit or district in South African context). For instance, if the principal realises that learners are struggling in Mathematics, he/she needs to negotiate with the learners and parents regarding the importance of improving performance on this subject and the appropriate times for extra-classes and enlist the support services of the circuit office.

It is argued that in rural environments the sense of place is crucial to the identities of individuals and communities (Save the Children, 2002). Rural settings are not defined by class status as in South African context people who live in suburbs are perceived to occupy higher social status than those who live in townships (Balfour, Mitchell & Moletsane, 2008). Aspiring to join that league, some people may migrate to the suburbs at some point in their lives. Ordinarily not defined by class leagues, rural environments provide fertile ground for better relationships amongst community members and between those community members and the land (Balfour, Mitchell & Moletsane, 2008). The sense of belonging to a particular rural locale defines the identity of individuals in those rural communities. Further, relatively perceived not to have class distinctions, the interpersonal relations amongst individuals in rural communities is comparatively better, which embraces the relationship they have with one another and their land. This state of affairs does not necessarily translate into non-existence of gender and power relations issues however; the ownership of land determines the status of individuals or families in rural communities (Balfour, Mitchell & Moletsane, 2008). Typically in rural milieus, ownership of land and responsibility for land are communal though land is held by the chief on behalf of the community (Balfour, Mitchell & Moletsane, 2008). Though the chief is the custodian of communal land, by virtue of being the chief, land ownership is perceived to define the status of community members.

Thus, rural locales are generative (agents) as their landscape impacts on how the people in these locales interact with one another (Balfour, Mitchell & Moletsane, 2008). This refutes the perception that rural environments are in perpetual stasis mode (Balfour, Mitchell & Moletsane, 2008). In this regard, the theory takes cognisance of entropy as either generated by the environment or the application of a specific kind of will that intends to categorise the relationship between space, time and agency so that space, time and agency are

counterbalanced against one another (Balfour, Mitchell & Moletsane, 2008). The forces prevalent in the environment or a particular strain of will may generate entropy that maintains the status quo. This balance is highlighted in the Rural Teacher Education Project (RTEP) study where participants (learners and teachers) resignedly state that rural settings will never change and that reality needs to be accepted as it is (Balfour, Mitchell & Moletsane, 2008). Such equilibrium may find expression in the principals' or parent community's attitudes or perceptions that their rural schools will never transform or they do not have the capacity to transform from within and such state of affairs needs to be accepted as it is. This becomes a vote of no confidence in the potential of their own localised agency which then relegates it to the background to the detriment of their own schools and communities who should be beneficiaries of such agency. To this end, entropy characterises a form of stasis that breeds the mentality that the rurality realities are "pre-destined and inevitable" in response to the harsh contextual reality of such a setting, the communities and the government's lack of will (Balfour, Mitchell & Moletsane, 2008). With such mentality, the agency of rural communities which has the potential to revolutionise their space, that is in essence generative, remains unexploited. This perpetually entrenches helplessness and the status quo.

3.4.4 Resources: Situated, Material and Psychosocial

Like forces and agencies, resources have a diverse range of common meanings which may refer to the emotional and material resources or physical and conceptual resources (Balfour, Mitchell & Moletsane, 2008). Some resources may be bought however, utilising them effectively essentially depends on the impact of the interplay of forces and agencies and the degree to which the forces and agencies may constrain either the availability or the utilisation of resources (Balfour, Mitchell & Moletsane, 2008). The effective deployment of resources cannot be divorced from the influence of the dynamic variables of forces and agencies and the extent to which such influence may hamper maximum accessibility or constrict maximum employment of these resources. Even if some resources may be available, it becomes futile if the influence of the forces and the agencies is not mitigated to facilitate their meaningful deployment. A rural school may have some resources which need electricity to function, like a photocopier. If this school does not have electricity (forces), such resources become wasted and useless white elephants. The very same school may not have money to pay for a security guard which leaves the school vulnerable to housebreaking. If the community does not take ownership and find ways to protect their school (agency), the very same limited resources will

be lost to theft and vandalism. The sense of belonging and the sense of allegiance to a particular place may not only widen access to resources but it may also modify the relationship between space and time (Balfour, Mitchell & Moletsane, 2008). Extension of accessibility to resources emanating from the bond individuals have with their localities enables people to shrink the time it takes within space to access a particular service. This is starkly highlighted in home-grown or community-grown healthcare initiatives. Such initiatives indicate that the community and the health workforce proactively take initiative to alleviate the plight of the people who are affected or infected by diseases and other social ills (Balfour, Mitchell & Moletsane, 2008). Effectively, communities generate resources within their settings therefore, resources are also generative (Balfour, Mitchell & Moletsane, 2008). To this end, the rural communities have the generative capacity to utilise these resources which is dependent upon the impact the agencies have on the forces. Such generative capacity is fuelled by agency.

The interplay between the forces, agencies and resources becomes crucial in the face of ascertaining the nuances in understandings and conceptualisations of rurality. For rural communities, generating and using their resources becomes contingent upon the interface between forces and agencies. Such interface of the three dynamic variables is central to an all-embracing, comprehensive approach to rural settings. Though in some quarters, rurality may be conceptualised as a context that is stagnant and unprogressive, it is argued that rurality is a dynamically constructed combination of forces, agencies and resources which are starkly highlighted in the interactive engagements and lived experiences within which communities' workers and teachers are transformed (Balfour, Mitchell & Moletsane, 2008). The dynamism of rurality is typified by influence of the interaction of forces, agencies and resources in the lived experiences of individuals in the process of change. Understanding education as a "placed resource" may mean that resources which are effective and operational in one context may become ineffective and non-operational once they are deployed to other different contexts (Balfour, Mitchell & Moletsane, 2008). Providing schools without computers and electricity with media projectors refutes the understanding of education as a placed resource since such equipment will collect dust without being used for what they are intended for. Critical to the issue of the delivery of quality teaching and learning in the 21st century South Africa is for education stakeholders to understand how these resources can be effectively deployed throughout the wide spectrum of school contexts (Balfour, Mitchell & Moletsane, 2008). This becomes crucial particularly in the wake of fiscal constraints in quintile one rural schools.

3.5 Understanding Servant Leadership Theory (SLT)

Servant leadership is the practice of prioritising the needs of the people who are led over the personal interests of a leader (Laub, 1999). This leadership values people and empowerment of the people, community building, accountability to others, provision of leadership to the benefit of the led, power-sharing to the benefit of individuals, the entire organisation and the people being served by the organisation (Laub, 1999). School principals need to prioritise the needs of the learners, teachers and parents. Such prioritisation involves capacitating these stakeholders. Capacitating these people contributes to the collective capacity of the school communities to transform their schools and their communities in the face of adversities. Servant leadership foregrounds the purpose and the needs of the organisation and the people thereby relegating the leader's personal interests to the background (Woodruff, 2004). Therefore, servant leadership mainly focuses on the empowerment of those that are led in order to enhance their capacity to creatively execute their duties in the organisation (Stone & Patterson, 2005). Consequently, a servant leader is viewed as a leader who primarily aims to serve other people by committing to empowering them to fulfil their responsibilities and organisational mandates to the benefit of the organisation and the community at large (Page & Wong, 2000). Leading empowerment of all stakeholders in the schools, the principals contribute to school effectiveness and fulfilment of the mandate of quality public education. For instance, if the school principal does not empower the School Governing Body (SGB), this structure may fail to discharge its legitimate duties effectively or become defunct. In some cases SGBs that do not understand their mandate on school governance matters may move beyond their jurisdiction and meddle in the professional matters of the teachers at the schools. This may hamper the effectiveness of the school principals' leadership. Un-empowered SGBs therefore may derail the vision of school transformation. Metaphorically, this is like fielding players that are not fit for the game and still expect to win.

The common thread running through the above conceptualisations of servant leadership are two characteristics. Firstly, what fundamentally epitomises servant leadership is serving humanity. Given this, Greenleaf (1977) asserts that a key pre-requisite of becoming a servant leader is becoming a servant first. The leaders are servants of the people they lead. This suggests that servant leadership is unselfish and defies self-serving interests and practices. Secondly, to servant leaders, capacity building is very crucial as it enhances the capacity of individuals in the organisation to deliver the core business effectively and efficiently. In

essence, servant leadership revolves around servanthood and sacrifice for the common good. Given the above, it is clear that service to humanity is the bedrock of servant leadership. Allowing their personal interests to feature in their leadership, the school principals may impair the very cornerstones of servant leadership that they should uphold. To that end, the acid test of servant leadership, which may not be easy to apply, is the question whether people who are served experience growth as individuals, they become more enlightened, more independent and more inclined to commit to serving others themselves and whether the marginalised will benefit or their status will be aggravated (Greenleaf, 1977). In essence, whichever facets of life it may be, the acid test orbits around the question whether the people who are led are put in a better position than they were in before servant leadership. As servant leaders, school principals need to ask the question whether, for example, the individual teachers at their schools experience continuing professional growth or whether they are more likely to emulate servant leadership practices. Furthermore, the principals need to ask whether their leadership practices are improving academic performance of learners who have been performing poorly, particularly in Mathematics and English First Additional Language.

Assuming servant leadership role starts with a natural feeling that an individual wishes to be a servant. Accordingly, individuals need to become servants first and subsequently decide to aspire to be leaders (Greenleaf, 1977). This is echoed by Bender (1997) who states that leadership starts from within. Aspiring to lead schools need to begin with the desire to serve other people. Thus, serving humankind is not linked to positions or titles (Greenleaf, 1977). Resonating with Greenleaf (1977), Sharma (2010) believes that one does not need a title to become a leader and similarly, holding a title does not necessarily make one a leader. A teacher does not have to have a title of a principal or deputy principal to become a leader or a learner does not have to hold the title of a president of the Representative Council of Learners (RCL) to become a leader. They can serve others without these titles. This suggests that the leadership of school principals should not be driven by personal gain or monetary benefits and acquisition of status. At the heart of their leadership is the innate urge to serve by providing the support framework and the necessary resources for the school stakeholder community to meaningfully discharge their responsibilities (Fairholm, 1998). What then is of paramount importance in a servant leader, a school principal in this case, is that the needs of individuals or stakeholders in the school are not superseded or overshadowed by the emphasis on the success of the school. Emphasis on the success of the school and policy mandates at the expense of prioritising the needs of the stakeholders may yield inadvertent consequences involving, *inter alia*, breeding

resistance and stunting growth. If their needs are not prioritised, it is most unlikely that they can commit to serving other people or can have the capacity to serve the needs of other people. It is my contention that if school principals prioritise the needs of the teachers, the teachers will in return prioritise the needs of the learners. School principals who are servant leaders seek to serve the people so that those people become what they are capable of becoming or the best they can be. Consequently, De Pree (1989) asserts that the core of the nature of servant leadership is to serve, not to lead. To this end, the beneficiaries of servant leadership practices are those that are led even if such practices are in conflict with the leaders' (school principals', in this instance) self-interests (Laub, 1999; Patterson, 2003). This indicates that the school principals need to consciously choose between serving their school communities and personal interests, of which the former needs to take precedence over the latter.

3.5.1 Characterising SLT

Asserting that leadership should be about service, Spears (1998) has identified ten characteristics of servant leadership, namely: listening, empathy, healing, awareness, persuasion, conceptualisation, foresight, stewardship, commitment to growth of others and building communities which are discussed below.

3.5.1.1 Listening

For servant leaders listening involves listening actively, silence, reflection and listening and to "hear" both what is said and unsaid (Spears, 1998). School principals, as servant leaders, are able to listen effectively to their inner voices and the voices of others in the school community. It takes a school principal who is committed to service to have the ability to "hear" the silent voices (unsaid) within the school. For instance, teachers may not say anything about their emotional well-being while their performance speaks volumes about their frustrations, whether personal or work-related. It may take a servant leader to reach out, to listen to and understand the unsaid. Listening effectively involves silence. Such silence breaks the silence of the people who are led regarding issues that are critical to the effectiveness and functionality of the organisation. This may culminate in prompting the critical teaching and learning discourses within and beyond the school thereby putting both the principals and the served on a terrain of reflections which may ultimately translate into the desired changes for the school. Being good listeners, school principals are able to empathise with the people they serve. The pre-requisite

for empathising is listening effectively as it may be impossible to empathise meaningfully without understanding exactly what there is to empathise with.

Such a pre-requisite flows from the understanding that empathising may enhance the confidence of teachers and learners regardless of their performance (Greenleaf, 1977). Thus, school principals need to avoid "selective listening" which translates into deliberately listening effectively to some people while listening dismissively to others. Underpinning the desire to serve is the principle of classlessness and selflessness (Smith, Montagno & Kuzmenko, 2004). This means all school stakeholders need to be afforded equal rights of access to support, resources and development. A servant leader, the school principal in this instance, needs to be prepared to serve humankind (school community) without prejudice irrespective of the socioeconomic status of those served (school community) nor their geographical location, whether urban or rural. Flowing from this, is the altruistic approach to service that school principals need to employ to ensure equal and indiscriminate access of the served to their (principals') "unselective ears". This will also encourage critical professional dialogue within the school which may benefit all facets of school life.

3.5.1.2 Empathy

Servant leaders make it their mission to understand and empathise with the people they lead in an organisation (Spears, 1998). However, such understanding and empathising need to take the form of a solid support framework rather than a display of condescending approaches. Over a period of time, a condescending approach to realities of the people who are served may institutionalise silence amongst them. Through the institutionalising of silence, the learning trajectory of the organisation is constrained which may ultimately render it stagnant and thus fail to fulfil its mandates. When leaders empathise with the people they lead and accept them for what they are irrespective of their performance or what they can or cannot do, the confidence of those people is boosted (Greenleaf, 1977; Spears, 1998). For teachers and learners, having an empathising school principal in their corner in the face of their day-to-day reality becomes a confidence amplifier as it shows that their leader has confidence in them. The school community or the people who are served are more likely to trust the school principals who empathise with and accept them (Greenleaf, 1977; Spears, 1998). This may create and sustain the relationship of trust between the leader and the led which is crucial to professional collaborations within the school. Empathising with the individuals who are led,

the school principals may be able to walk in the shoes of those they serve, not parallel to them, thereby ascertain or experience their nuanced contextual realities which may then inform their context-conscious practices. Walking in the shoes of those they serve may enable the school principals to customise their responses or support to suit individual or group needs. Without this element, in my view, empathy is rendered meaningless and futile.

3.5.1.3 Healing

Flowing from empathy is the process of healing. Healing can be facilitated by empathy of the leaders within the organisations (Spears, 1998). This may take place when there is horizontal communication between the school principal and the people that are served. Servant leaders are able to heal themselves and the people they lead. For this healing to take place, leaders need to understand personal and organisational health (Spears, 1998). School principals need to understand the state, the tone and the character of the schools they lead. Such understanding is crucial, particularly in this post-apartheid and post-conflict South Africa. The struggle for freedom against the apartheid regime was protracted and characterised by violence (Christie, 2016). Inevitably, conflict zones culminate in social fragmentation which may translate into social ills like, *inter alia*, violence, crime, illiteracy and unemployment. Such social fragmentation needs to be addressed during the post-conflict process of social reconstruction and development (Christie, 2016). This process includes the reconstruction of education. Since the reconstruction of education is part of healing, school principals need to understand the impact of apartheid and conflict on communities, particularly rural communities and their schools. Further, they need to appreciate whether such impact finds or does not find its expression in the prevalent range of social ills in those communities. This is crucial since the schools are microcosms of the communities they serve. This suggests that for a meaningful process of healing to take place, school principals need to understand the backgrounds of school communities they serve and subsequently, those of learners and parents from those communities. Without such understandings, it may become an elusive dream for the principals to lead healing which sustains organisational health.

Furthermore, healing is a process that comprise six stages, namely: being conscious of one's health mostly triggered by incidents, the will to take steps to effect changes to enhance one's health, willingness to solicit advice or learn from others, finding a healthy support framework necessary for change that may involve an individual or groups, engaging the dichotomy of our

inner selves thereby realising our weaknesses and strengths as well as finally returning to serve as a leader through learning from others (Spears, 1998). The first stage commences when the teacher becomes aware that there are disciplinary challenges in his/her class. Healing may take place when the school principal listens to the disciplinary challenges that a teacher contends with in class and without prejudice, offers support, assistance and empowers the teacher on how to mitigate such challenges to the benefit of all learners. Subsequent to being aware of disciplinary challenges in class, is the willingness of the teacher to approach the principal in a bid to alleviate his/her plight.

What then follows is the moment when the teacher approaches the school principal to obtain advice regarding his/her challenge in class. This is referred to as a teachable moment (Spears, 1998). Given this, the school principal provides the necessary sound professional support which may also involve, in South African context, the services of Master Teachers at the school (Department of Basic Education, 2016). This may become a continuous process of mentoring (by Master Teachers, amongst others) the teacher on maintaining class discipline for as long it is necessary. This advice and mentoring can assist the teacher to engage with the dichotomy of his/her inner self regarding his/her strengths and weaknesses. Lastly, the teacher will return to serve in leading his/her classes through advice and support from the school principal and colleagues. This is regarded as the process of renewal. As illustrated above, once the principal empowers and offers support to the teacher, that teacher may go back to class with renewed confidence, courage and commitment. Thus, healthy interpersonal relationships amongst the teachers and learners and between the teachers, learners and the school principals may translate into a healthy school. Moving within that premise, Sharma (2010) believes that the quality of the organisation (school) is characterised by the quality of relationships amongst the individuals (for example, teachers) within that organisation. Such nature of organisational quality becomes a fertile ground for meaningful empathy, healing and awareness. However, school principals need to understand that they have to deal effectively with their own health as it is more unlikely that they can provide healthy support systems for the entire school community if their own health is compromised.

3.5.1.4 Awareness

In my view, the process of renewal may take place if there is awareness. School principals, as servant leaders, need to have awareness in general and self-awareness in particular (Spears,

1998). The vehicle through which the principal can develop self-awareness is self-reflection (Spears, 1998). This self-awareness in school principals may develop through looking inside their inner selves, listening to what other people are saying about them, being constantly ready to learn or adapt and maintaining the link between what their values are and what they say or do (Spears, 1998). It is my contention that if the school principals stop listening to the people they are leading, it is the day they and the schools they are leading will stop learning. By being constantly open to learning as individuals, learning from and through others irrespective of their status or position in the organisation, servant leaders (school principals) may entrench ownership of the decisions taken which may pave the way for effective implementation of the schools' transformation agenda. School principals need to reflect on their inner truths, listen to the voices of teachers, learners and parents in the school, be ready to learn from them and align their (school principals) walk to their talk. In this vein, self-awareness may also be triggered by listening receptively to the voices of the school community.

Reflecting on their inner truths, school principals need to harmonise their narratives with their behaviours. This means that the school principals need to lead from the front through "practising what they are preaching" which may effectively mirror, inter alia, their value systems. It is in this context that Page and Wong (2000) believe that as servant leaders, school principals should be driven by values and character. This resonates with claims by Greenleaf (1977) that leadership flows from personal traits rather than specialised leadership skills. This is best captured in the assertion that, central to servant leadership is character. However, servant leadership manifests itself in skills like effective listening, persuasion and effective articulation of organisational issues (Greenleaf, 1977; Spears & Lawrence, 2002). The innate urge to become a servant shapes how the principals interact with stakeholders and lead their schools. Serving in rural or urban contexts, school principals need to adopt the belief that all people are equal and they, by virtue of being principals, are by no means better than the people they serve; teachers, learners and parent community. Generally, this embraces the awareness and particularly self-awareness as it needs to flow from the inner reality of the school principals. Awareness regarding a range of generic and core school business and school principals' self-awareness regarding their leadership and how it influences school business become crucial in the process of turning around the school.

3.5.1.5 Persuasion

It is argued that persuasion is one of the critical skills that a servant leader needs to possess (Greenleaf, 1978, 1980). Servant leaders persuade other people instead of using their position to compel people to comply or agree with them (Spears, 1998). It is very important for the school principals to allow the uncensored contestation of ideas in the school while they use their persuasive skills to convince other people that their ideas or their line of thinking, regarding school matters, is progressive. Coercing people to accept and implement a decision may be met with resistance which may stunt growth while persuading them may increase the chances of effective implementation of such a decision. Therefore, school principals who are servant leaders do not seek to control the stakeholder community including teachers, learners and parents but they share their ideas in a bid to facilitate common understanding amongst everyone. To this end, it is Greenleaf's (1977) contention that when leaders persuade people they lead, there is a benefit of change taking place through consensus rather than coercion. Reaching consensus may mean that every voice was afforded a fair hearing which recognises the importance of the contributions of the people who are served. Further, Covey (1990) posits that power flowing from persuasion and character is "principle-centred power" (p. 102) which is based on principles and empowers other people.

Conversely, the power that flows from coercion is "position-centred power" which is based on positions/ may breed resistance and disempower the led, in this instance, to the detriment of the school and the community. Consequently, in a school environment where persuasion prevails, the school stakeholder community that is served may perceive themselves as equal partners. Articulating a collectively crafted vision of the school by the school principal to all stakeholders may breed fertile ground for effective persuasion to thrive. This may sustain their commitment to readily follow the principal in the collective quest to transform their school. Having been a teacher for twenty six years, eight of which I was the Head of Department, I have observed that it is through persuasion that teachers become prepared to perform above the bare minimum and gradually move beyond the call of duty voluntarily. The Department of Basic Education does not pay teachers for working beyond the prescribed seven hours which may involve morning and afternoon classes, Saturday and/or Sunday extra classes. Consequently, legally the school principals cannot oblige teachers to work beyond prescribed hours and neither can the Department of Basic Education. Rather, it is through articulating the vision and highlighting the plight of the learners, particularly in rural communities that the

school principal is able to motivate teachers to be selfless and willingly defy their contextual adversities to the benefit of learners.

3.5.1.6 Conceptualisation

As servant leaders persuade people, they apply conceptualisation of the direction the organisation is taking or will be taking (Spears, 1998). They seek to develop the vision about their leadership and the institutions they are leading. To conceptualise means being able to view the organisation holistically on the basis of what has happened in the past and what needs to happen or will happen in the future (Greenleaf in Frick & Spears, 1998). This involves formulating and modifying goals to be achieved, evaluating, analysing and forecasting the realities the organisation encounters or will encounter. This assists the school principals to remain steadfast in the track of their core business mandates without or with limited risk of being derailed. Furthermore, they are able to customise their interventions to maximise delivery of quality education, in the case of a school. School principals need to be visionaries who are able to metaphorically tread in the terrain that has not yet been treaded by the schools they lead through vision. In this way, school principals who are servant leaders strive to develop the ability to dream progressively about the present and the future of their schools. By so doing, they lead from the front. By leading from the front, school principals provide direction. It is my contention that if school principals fail to provide direction, stakeholders will pull to different directions or lose direction which may render the school static or dysfunctional. To this end, school principals become the current and future compass of school operations within the schools they are leading.

Existence of such a compass through the principals' leadership assist the schools to anticipate changes and challenges. Such anticipation may translate into the school being able to initiate and manage change and effectively mitigate existing or defuse potential challenges. This suggests that if the school principals metaphorically venture into the unknown at the same time as the people they are leading (suggesting failing to apply conceptualisation), it may compromise the provision of direction and purpose or aggravate the schools' realities. The rapidly ever-changing nature of the realm of educational practice demands that the goals are constantly revisited and evaluated in order to be aligned with the realities emanating from the changes. It is through such anticipation that the school principals conceptualise the terrain the school may have to take en route to the future. This requires the skill of persuasion in taking

every stakeholder into their confidence regarding the appropriate terrain the school needs to take to realise its vision. Therefore, leadership of school principals means being in the forefront, showing the direction. Showing the direction is more conceptual than the actual school operations (Spears, 1998). It is in this vein that the school principals who conceptualise about the schools they lead are considered persuaders and relationship builders (Spears, 1998). This suggests that school principals are more likely to persuade people they lead successfully if they create and maintain sound interpersonal relationships with them. Absence or lack of these attributes may translate into the vision of the school failing to become a reality if the school principals fail to articulate it effectively to the entire school and the community at large.

3.5.1.7 Foresight

Conceptualising about the actualities of their schools, principals need to have the foresight. Being able to predict the likely consequences or impact of a given situation is referred to as the foresight (Spears, 1998). It is of vital importance for the school principals as servant leaders to have foresight that enables them to foresee the possible outcomes or impacts of a set of past and current realities that their schools contend with. This may assist them to engage with forward planning to ensure that in the event of any eventuality in the realm of educational practice, the mandate of the schools to deliver quality public education is not compromised. This becomes critical if the schools and school principals are to realise their quest to turn their schools around and develop the people they lead so that they align them with the vision of the school. Foresight cannot be compared to an ordinary speculation regarding what is to take place and when it will take place (Greenleaf, 1991). However, foresight characterises "the lead" that the leader, particularly school principal, has (Greenleaf, 1991). Metaphorically, the stakeholders need to be able to stand on the shoulders of the foresight giants (school principals) so that they are able to see where they could otherwise not be able to see. Given this, it may not be impossible to mobilise the school stakeholder collective to rally behind the school principals in their collective quest to deliver on their mandates.

This suggests that if the school principals do not have or lack foresight, they essentially do not have "the lead" that the servant leaders should have. In the absence of such a "lead" schools may degenerate into dysfunctionality and chaos and may not be commensurate with the level of complexity in the environment within which they operate. Further, foresight constantly considers and evaluates the current circumstances against the background of the previous set

of forecasts that had been made while in the same vein making projections for the future (Spears, 1998). In the educational arena, these circumstances may refer to, amongst others, the policy changes and policy interventions or availability or unavailability of resources or socioeconomic status of the community where the school operates. Therefore, the school principals need to understand the historical backgrounds of their schools and the contexts in which they serve; compare the past and the present and chart the way to the future. Foresight therefore cannot be divorced from context, it needs to be applied within a context. Decontextualized foresight may defeat the ends of its application/operationalisation. In such a scenario, though the school principal may have "the lead", it will be an "irrelevant lead" which may exacerbate the challenges emanating from the lack of direction.

3.5.1.8 Stewardship

Stewardship fundamentally constitutes service (Russell & Stone, 2002). Stewardship is characterised by servanthood. Therefore, servant leaders consider themselves to be stewards. Steward embraces the notion of a trustee; an individual who is entrusted with something invaluable (De Pree, 1989). Resonating with Block (1993), De Pree (1989) submits that essentially willing to be accountable for the welfare of the community at large through serving people around us is stewardship. School principals are trustees of the school communities they serve. They are entrusted with the task of ensuring that their schools deliver quality public education in order to develop the communities where these schools are located and for the greater common good of society. School principals as servant leaders are therefore custodians of education at school level. They account to the parent community; the people they serve. However, Block (1996) posits that stewardship means being accountable without being obliged to do so. Accountability needs to voluntarily feature prominently in the principals' leadership of schools. Such accountability may lead to transparency. The desire to serve is innate therefore, a servant leader subscribes to accountability without any external pressure. School principals are, in the main, entrusted with public funds in the form of school allocations and school fees in the case of fee paying schools. In the face of limited fiscal resources in quintile one schools, school principals need to possess requisite school financial management skills so that they are able to utilise their limited resources effectively and efficiently.

Possessing such skills alone and striving constantly to perfect such skills constitutes service. They also need to account to the parent community through regular financial reports regarding

the use of public funds without being compelled to do so by or beyond the prescriptions of the Department of Basic Education. Such practice epitomises service. This constitutes stewardship. Being stewards, servant leaders consider the people they serve as people that are entrusted to them so that they could develop and assist them to realise their full potential and be the best they can be (Sendjaya & Sarros, 2002). Since the school principals are entrusted with the education of the children in different communities, they need to lead the teaching and learning processes which assist learners to tap their untapped potential. Furthermore, school principals need to capacitate the School Governing Body (SGB) and the Representative Council of Learners (RCL) and, amongst others, conscientise them on the South African Schools Act to ensure that they discharge their governance responsibilities effectively to the benefit of the entire school community. It is to that end that Russell and Stone (2002) echo Greenleaf (1977) in his belief that all organisation stakeholders, leaders and followers are stewards so they have a crucial role to play in holding the organisation in trust for the benefit of the society at large. In a school, teachers, learners, parents or support staff become stewards as they each have distinct responsibilities to fulfil to sustain the school. Such a belief embraces capacity building within the entire organisation irrespective of the titles or positions people hold in the organisation. Under servant leadership, it is not only the principal who is a steward, but also other school stakeholders as they hold the school in trust to ensure that it discharges its mandate for the common good of their communities.

3.5.1.9 Commitment to growth of others

Being stewards, servant leaders are resolutely committed to capacity building and empowerment of the people they serve and they are willing to do everything within their reasonable power to mentor other people (Spears, 1998). School principals need to commit themselves to their own development and the development of individuals within the organisation irrespective of their positions, whether academic or support staff. These school principals also equally benefit from professional development (Greenleaf, 1977). It is my contention that if school principals do not develop themselves or lack professional development, it is most unlikely that they will appreciate the perpetual need for such, provide or facilitate development or afford others access to professional development. School principals may provide professional development and support themselves or organise external agencies or enlist the services of the education district. Therefore, school principals need to ensure that teachers are constantly exposed to professional development to eliminate any

chances of rendering them stagnant due to lack of professional growth. Under servant leadership of the school principals, teachers need to constantly access or experience professional growth which is critical in ensuring that they remain professionally relevant to the vision and mission of the school and most importantly, the aspirations of the communities they serve. School principals understand that the provision of professional support and resources is crucial to the realisation of the quest to improve leaners' academic performance.

The role of the support staff is equally important. For the support staff to execute their duties effectively, continuous on-the-job training and development is critical. If the school administrative clerk, for example, is not conversant with the South African School Administration and Management Systems (SA-SAMS), it may be difficult for the school to have accurate electronic administrative, governance and academic records complying with the regulatory prescripts of the Department of Basic Education. Furthermore, committing to growth of others, the school principals may ensure that the Representative Council of Learners receives training on school finance management and interpretation of policies regarding school finances. Lastly, by ensuring that there is quality teaching and learning in the classrooms, learners may also experience growth in different spheres of their lives thereby preparing them for their future careers. Given the above, servant leadership may not materialise or find its expression if there a lack of or no individual growth within the organisation. This suggests that through fulfilling commitment to individual growth, the school principals as servant leaders are able to give meaning to service. De Pree (1989) posits that the vestiges or footprints of exceptional leadership manifest themselves amongst the people who are led indicating whether such people are maximising their potential or developing or willing to serve others. In this vein, how the school principals serve their people, need to persuade those people to aspire to emulate servanthood themselves.

3.5.1.10 Building communities

Empowering individuals in the organisation may translate into building different communities and ultimately the nation. Servant leaders strive to find avenues they can explore in order to build communities (Spears, 1998). These avenues may involve serving communities as a way of giving back, monetary investment to communities and ensuring about the welfare of one's community (Spears, 1998). Driven by the urge to serve, school principals need to become community builders by identifying means through which they can develop their communities.

Given that schools are a microcosm of society, serving through leading schools in their communities, principals are already on the pathway to building communities. Being a community builder means that the principal goes beyond the bounds of the school to reach out to members of the community in general with the intention of elevating them to a better position. This may involve, for example, amongst others, securing a sponsor that will build a school computer laboratory and subsequently offer computer literacy classes to members of the community and organising community outreach programmes where learners educate their own communities about drugs and alcohol abuse and other social ills. By so doing, the principals' sense of belonging finds its expression through a sense of purpose which does not translate into rejection or suppression of their uniqueness. This suggests that principals do not necessarily need to be residents in or members of the communities where their schools are located for them to contribute to community building. It is the sense of collective purpose and vision that enable them to walk in the shoes of school communities in terms of their aspirations regarding their schools.

As a community builder, the school principal needs to synergise the strengths of all community members to work towards realising the reality of constantly developing the community (Spears, 1998). To this end, the principals, as servant leaders, have to develop strong interpersonal skills, collaborate with other people regardless of their backgrounds and appreciate and respect the divergence of opinions. In this study, as servant leaders, school principals in rural contexts serving marginalised rural communities need to serve the people in such a way that the impact and manifestations of marginalisation are neutralised. It is in this context that the leadership of school principals is not viewed as a position but as the opportunity to serve humankind through empowering them to ultimately reach their maximum potential (Smith, Montagno & Kuzmenko, 2004). Serving humanity means that the principals capacitate their school communities based on the immediate needs and realities of the people rather than on what the school principals assume the people need. Consequently, distinctly characterising servant leadership, argues Graham (1991), is the acknowledgement of social responsibility by servant leaders to serve the less privileged, the marginalised and the resolute commitment to placing the needs of the served above those of their own and the organisation. School principals, as servant leaders, need to recognise that leading schools is a social responsibility and particularly, in those communities that have been relegated to the periphery. These principals need to demonstrate the will to elevate the interests of the school stakeholder community above the narrow individual interests for the greater common good.

3.6 Assemblage of theories

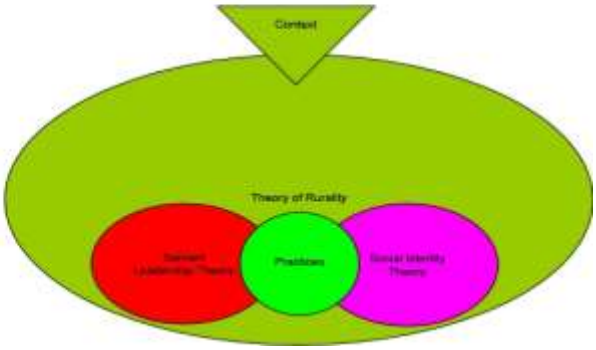

Figure 3.1: **Theoretical framework** (Balfour, Mitchell & Moletsane, 2008; Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Trepte, 2006; Greenleaf, 1977)

The study views the school principals in rural contexts as individuals who belong to different social groups (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Belonging to such groups defines who they are and their place in society. Their thoughts, actions and behaviour need to be commensurate with the social groups to which they belong (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Socially identified as leaders, the school principals view and understand their leadership through the lenses of such social groups. Being members of SADTU and the value school principals accord to such membership becomes their social identity. SIT highlights "the group in the individual principal" as belonging to a union that defines part of the self of the principal (Trepte, 2006). Effectively, union membership becomes the vehicle through which they understand part of who they are in the midst of their leading in rural contexts. What then characterises SADTU needs to be mirrored in how these principals think, behave and how they perceive their leadership realities. Therefore, how these principals lead their schools needs to be, amongst others, congruent to SADTU identity. Consciously choosing to be members of SADTU involves social comparison. Member principals constantly compare their SADTU (in-group) with other teacher unions (out-groups) which starkly accentuates differences amongst them. In some cases, contexts may dictate the social groups which these school principals may join depending on their availability, accessibility and relevance. For instance, identifying with a particular social group and

maintaining such membership may be affected by, amongst others, the time it takes in space to access that group or access its activities or services.

To this end, contexts may become a crucial determiner in the process of seeking affiliation to different social groups. The identities of the school principals becomes context-laden which does not necessarily translate into them being laden with strictly rural or urban context. Further, leading in rural contexts may influence their day-to-day leadership practices. Such practices therefore, are not operationalised in a vacuum, they are context-embedded (Noman, Hashim & Abdullah, 2016). This suggests that leadership practices need to be commensurate with the reality of the space within which they are applied. Ensuring that they are commensurate with immediate reality demands that the principals become servant leaders who are driven by the quest to empower and build communities. To this end, the school principals need to understand their rural contexts and the dynamic variables that may enable or disable, mitigate or aggravate their leadership realities (Balfour, Mitchell & Moletsane, 2008). Understanding the dynamic variables of forces, agencies and resources may assist the school principals to appreciate the capacities of rural communities to alleviate their plight, to resist or transform their localities depending on the resources at their disposal (Balfour, Mitchell & Moletsane, 2008). Having such an understanding may enable these school principals to invoke their individual agency or mobilise community agency to transform their schools. This constitutes servant leadership. It dispels the notion of deficit approach to understanding or operationalising their leadership in rural contexts.

Mobilising agencies to the benefit of their schools epitomises servant leadership which values people and empowerment of the people, community building, accountability to others, provision of leadership to the benefit of the led, power sharing to the benefit of individuals, the entire organisation and the people being served by the organisation (Laub, 1999). Leading the campaign for launching of school vegetable gardens may encourage learners and parents to start their own gardens at home which may partly alleviate poverty. Capacitating people may find its real expression in the servant leader's invoking of agency that speaks to their day-to-day realities. Greenleaf (1977) asserts that before one becomes a servant leader, one needs to become a servant first. Becoming a servant first means that these principals need to commit themselves to serving people without prejudice. Such a commitment prioritises the needs and aspirations of their schools and communities over their personal interests. This means that school principals need to defy their personal, self-serving agendas and those of the people they

lead to eliminate the possibility of conflict of interest and total disregard of the needs of all the served. The ultimate acid test that these school principals need to set themselves is whether the people they serve are empowered and are most likely to emulate them to become servant leaders or servants of humankind themselves. In the face of deficit understandings of rurality, servant leadership of school principals may rebut the deficit narratives that transformation initiatives of rural communities may only be externally sourced. With these principals leading form the front, the school community may begin to realise that their environment is full of possibilities that they can exploit.

3.7 Chapter conclusion

This chapter has presented a theoretical framework that underpins this study. Forming this theoretical framework are three theories, namely: Servant Leadership Theory, Theory of Rurality and Social Identity Theory. For each of these theories, the chapter has discussed what they entail, what their prominent features are and how the study is framed within them. The chapter concludes by presenting the assemblage of these theories as a framework within which the dynamics of leading primary schools in rural contexts is framed. The theoretical framework becomes the overarching lenses through which the researcher frames the sense-making process to enhance comprehensive understandings of the study.

The next chapter deals with mapping out the research journey.

CHAPTER FOUR

MAPPING OUT THE RESEARCH JOURNEY

4.1 Introduction

Chapter Three dealt with the theoretical framework within which this study is framed. This framework comprises an assemblage of three theories, namely: Servant Leadership Theory, Theory of Rurality and Social Identity Theory. This chapter presents the research design and methodology that informs this study. To remind the reader, the research puzzles (research questions) that inform the study are as follows:

The main research puzzle is:

- What are the lived experiences of principals leading primary schools in rural contexts?

This will be addressed by the following sub-puzzles:

- Who are the principals leading primary schools in rural contexts?
- What meanings and understandings do the principals draw on in their leadership of rural primary schools?
- What are the day-to-day leadership practices of these principals of rural primary schools?

The chapter presents the research paradigm within which this study is located. Thereafter, methodological issues will be addressed. Such issues involve the selection of participants and research sites, data generation methods, data analysis, ethical considerations, ensuring trustworthiness and the limitations of the study.

4.2 Research paradigm

It is the American philosopher Thomas Kuhn who first used the term “paradigm” in 1962 to refer to way of thinking philosophically (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017). In social sciences research paradigms are deliberately chosen sets of lenses researchers utilise to view and understand realities (Nieuwenhuis, 2013). It is a framework of lenses borne out of individual’s beliefs and assumptions about social reality, the nature of reality and how researchers interpret and

understand reality (Babbie, 2007; Creswell, 2007). This culminates in a distinct or specific view of the world. This suggests that a paradigm becomes the window through which we view our world and make meanings of such worlds. Thus, our understandings of our worlds are informed by the lenses through which we make meaning of our everyday realities. Consequently, paradigms are human constructions based on the basic set of beliefs and assumptions which guide research action (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Guba & Lincoln, 1994). How the dynamics of leading in rural contexts were revealed and viewed were on the basis of a chosen framework of lenses. A paradigm embodies our thoughts about the world though such thoughts cannot be proven. Therefore, how we act, inclusive of researchers themselves, cannot be de-linked from a paradigm. Hence, "as we think, so do we act" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 15). Our beliefs and assumptions influence our actions in the world. Organising our beliefs and assumptions into a particular perspective, it is through paradigms that we are able to narrate a coherent narrative through portraying the world which is meaningful though culturally-laden (Schwartz & Ogilvy, 1979).

In this study, lenses of the interpretivist paradigm were employed. These paradigmatic lenses informed how the leadership narratives of primary school principals in rural contexts were interpreted and understood. People's social realities are viewed as subjective hence the existence of a multiplicity of truths. This means reality is socially constructed (Nieuwenhuis, 2013). Hence what lies at the heart of the interpretivist paradigm is the understanding of the world of human experience (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). Therefore, understanding is embedded in the social interactions and our interpretations of the social world (Blaikie, 1993). Instead of the quest to find the truth, interpretivists focus on opening up possibilities (Blaikie, 1993). That which principals think they understand about their world is inevitably laden with subjectivity which is what undergirds social construction. Amidst the possibilities, interpretivist researchers argue that the meanings are unique and interpretation is crucial if movement is to be made beyond data (Graneheim & Lundiman, 2004). This means the principals' social worlds are unique hence their meanings and understandings feature uniqueness. School principals may lead schools in a rural context within the same school district however, this does not translate into homogeneity of their meanings and understandings. Furthermore, knowing about the objective reality that exists "out there" is not the concern of the interpretivist researchers. Instead they are concerned with knowing and exploring the specific subjective realities existing "in there" in the participants' experiences in their social worlds (McKenna, Richardson & Manroop, 2011, p. 150). Hence the purpose of this study is to explore the principals' lived

leadership experiences through the narratives which the interpretivists consider to be specific subjective realities. Existing "in there" refers specifically to the storied phenomenon the principals draw from social world.

Interpretivism regards participants as agentic, constructing and re-constructing and crafting their lives and social worlds wherein their beings evolve (McKenna, Richardson & Manroop, 2011). Being agentic begins with the process of construction and re-construction of meanings the principals made of their lived experiences. Then, it flows that as a researcher in the interpretivist paradigm I sought to interpret and understand the social realities fundamentally from the participants' viewpoints directly involved in the research process (McKenna, Richardson & Manroop, 2011). The emphasis is on understanding the principals of rural primary schools and their interpretations of their leadership worlds. Essentially, it is through the eyes of the participants that their experiences are interpreted as best captured by the phrase "insider's point of view", not the researcher's (Nieuwenhuis, 2013). The prevalence of subjectivity need to be acknowledged as a central dimension of the research process, participants and the researchers themselves (McKenna, Richardson & Manroop, 2011). This accords credence to the reality that the narratives of primary school principals, which are subjective realities, became the medium through which their experiences were explored.

Interpretivism assumes subjectivist epistemology, a relativist ontology, a naturalist methodology and a balanced axiology (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017). On the one hand, when a researcher makes sense of his/her data generated, using his/her own cognitive processing of that data constitutes subjectivist epistemology. The assumption is that the participants and the researcher embark on interactive engagements involving dialoguing, reading, writing and recording research sessions. This suggest that social reality can be expressed through different medium hence the use of artefact inquiry, collage inquiry and life story interviews in this study. Further, participants and researchers interpret reality in a way that make sense to them. On the other hand, relativist ontology refers to the researcher believing that the phenomenon studied has manifold realities. Such realities can be explored and the meanings made of those realities or meanings re-constructed through interactions involving participants and researchers as well as amongst the participants (Chalmers, Manley & Wasserman, 2005). This accentuates that the research process became a co-construction of meanings embracing the researcher and the participants. Furthermore, naturalist methodology refers to the researcher utilising data

generated through interviews, discussions, reflective sessions and text messages with the researcher whose posture is that of a participant observer (Carr & Kemmis, 1986). In this study, amongst others, I used life story interviews. These interviews were conducted at the research sites, the participants' schools. Lastly, a balanced axiology acknowledges that the findings reflect values of the researcher in his/her attempt to present a balanced research report (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017). Though the interpretivists acknowledge subjectivity, they still need to be reasonably aware of the impact their perceptions may have on the findings of the study.

4.3 Research methodology

In my Masters dissertation I utilised case study research design as my study focused on the experiences of principals in fee paying and no fee paying schools. Persuading me to consider case study for this research project was that at Masters I engaged intensively with this research methodology therefore I was more comfortable with using it. However, the wisdom of hindsight triggered the reminder that the conventional, pre-determined semi-structured interviews I used limited the flow of the conversation and the possible depth of data I could have tapped into. Participants respond to questions posed by the researcher which may be perceived as channelling, imposing and perpetuating researcher-participant power imbalances. Such perceptions constrain the possibilities regarding the generation of thick data that reveal a multiplicity of underlying meanings. I needed to find methodology that was not perceived to be rigid, imposing and predetermined thereby appeal to the participants to delve deeper into their lived leadership experiences. At this point, it dawned on me that I had to discard the notion of utilising a case study. Consequently, examining the lived leadership experiences of rural primary school principals, I decided to employ narrative inquiry methodology. This methodology uses the mode of everyday communication which are stories to narratively inquire into the phenomenon under study. Given the largely relaxed atmosphere of everyday communication, participants tell their stories without apprehension of being irrelevant or expected to follow a pre-determined pattern of telling their life stories. Since it seeks to eliminate power imbalances, thereby making the researcher and the participants equal partners in the research process, participants are encouraged to produce thick data which may include experiences which may otherwise be potentially excluded given the nature of a case study.

This section is presented under the following sub-sections: narrative inquiry as a qualitative research methodology and narrative inquiry.

4.3.1 Narrative inquiry as a qualitative research methodology

Narrative inquiry has earned a firmly-established spot within the realm of qualitative research (Mueller, 2017). Narrative inquiry belongs to the family of qualitative research methodologies. The key to appreciating qualitative research lies with the notion that reality is a product of social construction emanating from individual interactions with their own worlds (Merriam & Grenier, 2019). The main focus of qualitative researchers is in deciphering how individuals experience and make sense of their worlds within a particular context and at a particular time (Merriam & Grenier, 2019). Qualitative research seeks to understand how individuals make meaning of their realities over time, given their naturalistic contexts. Since qualitative research focuses on eliciting participants' accounts of meaning and experiences, describing and understanding (Babbie & Mouton, 2001; de Vos et al., 2011), narratives endow an essential foundation to a number of existing qualitative research methodologies that are being used today. These methodologies include, *inter alia*, ethnography, narrative inquiry, autoethnography and grounded theory (Lewis & Hildebrandt, 2020). Narrative understanding is an inborn human capacity; individuals think, live and dream in storied form which makes it one of the primary forms of human sense-making processes (Lewis & Hildebrandt, 2020). This suggests that individual experiences as storied form become the framework through which meanings are constructed. Approach to this meaning construction is qualitative since qualitative researchers are mainly concerned with the thickness and depth of phenomena descriptions.

4.3.2 Narrative inquiry

Narrative inquiry is a way of understanding human experience through collaboration between the researcher and the participants over time, at one place or a number of places and within context (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Through such collaboration the researcher remains in the midst of living and telling, reliving and retelling the narratives of experience which constitute individual and social lives (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Prominently featuring in the definition of narrative inquiry is that, it is a study of experience as it is lived and told. Given the above, studying the experiences, the lived leadership experiences of primary school principals in this instance, cannot be meaningful beyond the bounds of their contexts. This takes cognisance of the constant interaction of human experiences in the process of making meaning. Narrative inquiry is both a methodology and a phenomenon (Connelly & Clandinin,

2006). Narratively thinking about and inquiring into the experiences of people is a methodology while as the phenomena it refers to the means through which people's experiences are understood (Clandinin & Caine, 2008). This study sought to understand the phenomenon of lived leadership experiences of principals through their narratives. Employing narrative inquiry as a methodology intends to inquire narratively into the lived experiences of principals leading schools in rural contexts. Consequently, Clandinin and Connelly (2000) assert that how one leads life is inextricably linked to how one tells about one's life. In this instance, how these principals led their schools and how they told about the experiences of leading these schools cannot be detached from each other.

Narrative inquiry affords the inquirer with the opportunity to intimately examine the people's experiences within a particular context and over a period of time (Clandinin & Caine, 2008). However, the starting point for the inquirers is to narratively inquire into their own experiences. Such a process needs to take place recurrently before, during and after the inquiry (Clandinin & Caine, 2008). This allows the inquirers to come alongside their research participants in order to understand and make meaning of the participants' experiences and participate in the ongoing lives of their participants (Clandinin & Caine, 2008; Clandinin, 2013). I narratively shared my experiences with the participant school principals before our life story interviews. As a narrative inquirer, I established and maintained close relationships with the research participants so that we were both able to construct and co-construct meanings we attach to our storied life experiences. This indicates that in narrative inquiry relationships take centre stage. This involves relationship amongst the inquirers and the research participants and the relationship of the experiences examined over a period of time within unique contexts (Clandinin & Caine, 2008). This suggests that lack of a sound relationship of trust between the researcher and the participants may constrain the flow of the storied lived experiences (between researcher and participants) thereby minimising or restraining the potential of the critical meaning making process.

Narratives of who people are and who others are influence their day-to-day lives in the midst of attaching meanings to their past based on these narratives. Therefore, these narratives become the access point through which people enter the world and make meaning of their experiences (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006). The leadership practices of the participant principals mirrored their early life experiences and how they attached meanings to their worlds. Narratives became a portal through which the school principals were enabled to participate

meaningfully in their worlds by utilising their storied life experiences to make meaning of their leadership experiences. Consequently, these narratives enabled the participant principals to understand, construct meanings and share their experiences since narratives are the vehicle through which the principals make sense of their very being, particularly leading schools in this instance (Clandinin, Murphy & Huber, 2011).

Narrative inquiry is tri-dimensional which embraces temporality, place and sociality commonplaces (Clandinin, Pushor & Orr, 2007; Clandinin, 2013). Temporality commonplace recognises that experiences are not fixed therefore, they are transitional characterised by the past, the present and the future (Clandinin, 2013). It is in this vein that Webster and Mertova (2007) state that narratives are persistently being restructured against the backdrop of most recent happenings since narratives are context-embedded and influenced by long-term individual and narratives of the community. This suggests that the leadership narratives of principals are constantly in a transitional mode driven by contextual influences of the past, present and future forces.

Sociality commonplace takes cognisance of personal and social conditions of the researcher and the participants of the study with the former being in a constant inquiry engagement with the experiences of participants (Clandinin, 2013). The narrative inquirers cannot divorce themselves from the principals' lived leadership experiences and their personal and socio-cultural factors.

Space commonplace specifically refers to a place or a number of places with defined boundaries within which the inquiry and events occur (Clandinin, Pushor & Orr, 2007; Clandinin, 2013). This study focuses on the quintile one primary schools which are located in rural contexts. The inquiry took place in the naturalistic environment of these schools. Furthermore, the narratives of experience, lived and told, are located within the larger socio-cultural and institutional narratives and they need to be understood in that context (Clandinin & Caine, 2008). In this instance, this study intended to inquire into the leadership narratives of primary school principals in rural contexts which are embedded in social, cultural and institutional narratives. Thus, the unfolding of the narrative inquiry was characterised by the interplay of the three above-mentioned commonplaces.

Narratives cannot be viewed as phenomena that are detached from reality however, they should be viewed as constituting meaningful links to and/or constituents of that reality (Webster &

Mertova, 2007). This indicates that the participant principals' stories of experience cannot be separated from their real life, which is leading primary schools in rural contexts. Such stories are related to and they form essential components that shape their leadership narratives. Therefore, utilising narratives at their disposal, people are able to make sense of their life worlds. This resonates with the assertion that in narrative inquiry, narratives are not only the vehicle through which transformation, development and learning take place, but they are also a life (Caine, Estefan & Clandinin, 2013). Consequently, identity is a storied construction of life, stories to live by (Clandinin & Huber, 2002). Echoing Clandinin and Huber (2002), Bold (2012) and Caine, Estefan and Clandinin (2013) assert that narratives become one of the fundamental ways through which our identity is constituted. Who we are therefore, is mirrored in the telling of our storied lives and living by our stories (Caine, Estefan & Clandinin, 2013). Narratives became the point of departure for the school principals in their quest to bring about transformational development of their schools and the school communities at large. Such a quest embodied and characterised their identities. To that end, the narratives of the participant school principals over a period of time at different times and contexts reflected how they identified themselves. Moreover, why they identified themselves in the manner they did as individual members of their communities and particularly, as professionals and principals leading schools in rural contexts. Inextricably linked to the identities of these principals were their narratives.

There are two points of departure for narrative inquiry, namely: engaging with the stories of the participants as they tell them and living alongside participants as they live by their stories (Clandinin, 2006; Clandinin & Caine, 2008). The former involves, in the main, conversations and interviews or interviews in the form of conversations. The latter involves observation of the participants or utilisation of visual media. Whichever point of departure the researcher prefers to start with, it is important to note that the researcher walks into the midst of stories involving the researchers', the participant principals', institutional and socio-cultural stories (Clandinin, 2006). My first point of departure in this study was to live alongside the participant principals as they lived out their storied lives in order to create a relationship with the participants and enabled participant observation. To this end, negotiating the establishment of intimate relationships with the participants becomes very critical. This involves the inquirer negotiating how they could be of assistance to the participants during and after the inquiry (Clandinin & Caine, 2008). I explained to the participant principals how narratively inquiring into their experience might trigger reflection and kick start a transformation curve for their

schools and communities. Then, I listened to these participant principals telling their stories. Since narratives are fundamental to human experience and existence (Bold, 2012) they enable the inquirers to holistically present experiences with their entire thickness and complexities (Webster & Mertova, 2007). Such holistic approach to experience allowed the researcher to dissect and understand the multi-faceted meanings ascribed to such experience, the principals' leadership narratives in this case.

4.4 Selection of participants and research sites

The process of selecting pertinent sites and participants for the study is referred to as sampling (Maree, 2013). Such a process may involve selection of an individual, a group or a setting within which the phenomenon under study is prone to happen (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). It becomes clear that the sampling process requires that the researcher makes explicit decisions with the intention of selecting participants which fit a pre-determined set of characteristics speaking directly to the critical questions of the study. This study intended to understand the lived leadership experiences of principals in rural contexts. Therefore, it was a small-scale study. Small-scale, qualitative studies utilise, in the main, non-probability sampling (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011) to ensure that they are manageable. I used this sampling strategy because I did not intend to generalise the findings of this study beyond this study (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011). The findings of this study were not to be generalised beyond the principals and the schools that were selected. Since this is a qualitative study, I utilised non-probability sampling. Consequently, within the umbrella of non-probability sampling, I selected the participants of this study through purposive sampling. Resonating with Grinnell and Unrau (2008) and de Vos, Delport, Fouche and Strydom (2011), Maree (2013) refers to purposive sampling as overt selection of individuals or events characterised as potentially possessing knowledge relevant to the phenomena being studied. This sampling strategy is also referred to as judgemental sampling (Rubin & Babbie, 2005) as it is purely on the basis of the researcher's judgement that research participants or settings are selected. It is in the same vein that Ball (1990) emphasises that purposive sampling affords the study access to knowledgeable people. In light of the preceding discussion, this technique of sampling is not confined to selection of individuals however, it involves contexts, events, activities and incidents pertinent to the generation of data (Nieuwenhuis, 2013). It involves unequivocal decisions for an unequivocally stated purpose of the research project. The intention is to obtain participant principals who could provide thick data regarding issues in question in the study. This is a

critical decision since it determines whether the study will be able to adequately respond to the research questions or achieve its aim and objectives. Principals with one to two years' experience are novice principals who still have to contend with reality shock in the process of trying to settle in their new leadership roles (Caruso, 2013; Spillane & Lee, 2014). This suggests that such principals may not have deeper understanding and insight of leading schools in rural contexts. Given the above, I selected four primary school principals with more than three years' experience in their positions. These school principals were selected for ease of access and because they had been school principals in rural contexts for more than three years. I cherry-picked these principals based on my judgement regarding their suitability for the focus of the study (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011). The schools that were selected were quintile one primary schools. In South African context, quintile one schools are the poorest schools hence the policy that declares them the no fee schools (Mestry & Berry, 2016). Levying of mandatory school fees is not allowed at these no fee schools. These participant schools are located in Ilembe District. This district was selected because it is mostly rural and it is easily accessible to me. These purposively selected information rich school principals provided this study with in-depth understandings and a critical insight of the participants' lived experiences of leading primary schools in rural contexts.

4.5 Field texts (data) generation methods

I used life story interview, collage life story elicitation technique and artefacts as field texts generation methods. To respond to the critical questions, the study utilised the life stories of the participant principals, therefore it was critical to trigger or prompt the memories of the participants. This assisted the participants and the researcher to present and obtain the holistic accounts of their experiences respectively. To this end, the collage life story elicitation technique and artefacts were used as memory-triggers to assist the participants to reflectively look deeper into their memory reservoirs (Martin & Merrotsky, 2006; Van Schalkwyk, 2010) regarding their lived leadership experiences.

4.5.1 Life story interview

Generating narrative data, I used life story interview, which Jovchelovitch and Bauer (2000) refer to as the narrative interview. This type of unstructured, in-depth interview intends to provide an environment which motivates and triggers the participants to tell stories, within their social contexts, regarding some of the important incidents in their lives (Jovchelovitch &

Bauer, 2000). In the life story interview, a conducive environment which is inviting to the participants, who are also referred to as informants (Jovchelovitch and Bauer, 2000) to tell their stories is created. This is made possible by the reality that narrative interview utilises a particular form of everyday communication, that is, storytelling and listening, to move beyond standardised protocols of structured question and answer interviews (Jovchelovitch and Bauer, 2000). Such an interview circumvents the ordinary pre-structuring of the interviews. In the absence of pre-structuring of interviews, the participants may be encouraged to give intensive accounts of their life stories. The pre-structured interviews may be perceived to be constraining the "natural" flow of narratives. Narrative interview is characterised by conversations wherein the narrative accounts are developed with the participant and the inquirer, as active participants, collaboratively making individual experiences meaningful (Riessman, 2008). This is echoed by Lai (2010) when she states that narratives are not rigidly structured but they are interactive and co-constructed by both the participant and the inquirer. This suggests that both the inquirer and the participant are actively involved in the sense-making process. This process is made possible since narrative interviews are perceived as conversations between participants which use rules of everyday communication: taking turns, remaining relevant, entrance and exit talks (Riessman, 2008). To this end, one narrative may lead to another as the participants and the inquirers negotiate opportunities for extended interactions and related shifts in themes and subthemes (Riessman, 2008). This establishes a climate that inspires the participants to tell their life stories in all its forms and sizes. This suggests that the participants may produce detailed narrative accounts thereby providing rich narrative data instead of short responses to questions. Thick narrative data are critical since this is a qualitative study.

Given the above context, the fundamental presumption is that the participants' perspectives are best laid exposed by narratives within which participants use their own unprompted language in telling their stories (Jovchelovitch and Bauer, 2000). Therefore, it is recommended that the inquirers need to avoid imposing any form of language which is not used by the participants during narrative interviewing (Jovchelovitch and Bauer, 2000). This suggests that it may be detrimental to prescribe the language that the participants need to use during the life story interview. Such prescriptions may compromise the potential of generating thick narrative data since it constrains participants from using the language they understand or the language that best describes particular turning points in their life stories. Such a non-imposing position characterises everyday conversation. This means that the inquirers are not in "control" of these narrative engagements. Making it possible in narrative interviews to have extended

opportunities of narrative engagements needs the inquirers to relinquish control which may result in apprehension. Relinquishing control (which characterises structured interview) fosters greater equality which encourages the participants to tell stories in their own ways (Riessman, 2008). This may culminate in a shift in power relations during narrative interviewing. Thus, the sharing of power between the inquirers and the participants may facilitate making of candid encounters about the phenomena under study (Riessman, 2008). If there is no one who is perceived to be in control, participants and inquirers become equal partners in the process of constructing meanings. Participants may be discouraged from holding back when telling their narratives. Instead, they may dig deeper into the repository of their life stories which may result to making sincere revelations about their experiences. Imposing and controlling skew the balance of power in favour of the inquirers. It becomes clear that if the inquirers want to understand experiences in all their complexities, thick details are of vital importance (Riessman, 2008). Such details involve, amongst others, particular events, occasions and life changing incidents in one's life.

Furthermore, stories make explicit the implicit meaning that life has for different individuals (Merleau-Ponty, 2002). Consequently, narratives become the human sense-making mechanism. As the participants tell their life stories, they construct meanings which help to make their worlds more meaningful. By telling narratives, individuals remember the past, sequence their experiences, explore possible meanings for them, and interact with a sequence of events that ultimately shape individuals and their social lives (Jovchelovitch and Bauer, 2000). In the narrative interview, participants revisit and arrange episodes in their lives into a meaningful whole. Such episodes are or have been used to attach meaning to their then reality and their current reality, understand their identities and their roles in their communities. Individuals are shaped by their narratives and the contexts within which such narratives unfold. Hence, the beliefs that people are storied selves (Bruner, 1990; McAdams, 1997) and stories are ingrained in human agency (Seale, Gobo, Gubrium & Silverman, 2007). Individuals live by their stories and their stories are embedded in their social life. Different communities and cultural groups tell their narratives using language and meanings which are particular to their experiences and how they lead their lives (Jovchelovitch and Bauer, 2000). Imposing language by the inquirers may be perceived as imposing meanings on the narratives of the participants. This may distort the meanings that the participants actually want to attach to their experiences. Such a distortion may ultimately de-contextualise the meanings the participants attach to their reality and their storied lives. Further, the languages used by communities are perceived to

constitute their world perspectives and the assumption is that narratives are there to legitimately preserve these perspectives (Jovchelovitch and Bauer, 2000). This indicates that the inquirers need to take cognisance of the socio-cultural contexts of the participants since individual narratives are context-ingrained. It is through the lenses of these narratives that the world is viewed and understood. However, having individuals from the same cultural group does not necessarily translate into homogenous narratives and meanings attached to such narratives. Every individual has his/her own unique narratives that exist and are articulated within a larger group. This is best captured in the assertion that experiences of individuals need to be understood as accounts of their lives that are storied and ingrained in an articulate, meaningful context (Rosenthal, 1993). It is these storied accounts that render human lives meaningful.

To this end, it is through narrative interviewing that the inquirers will encounter their participants as people engaging in a process of interpreting themselves (Riessman, 1993). Through telling their stories, individuals are able to make meaning of themselves, their realities and their identities. In essence, the narratives become the vehicle through which people make sense of their lives in a given context. Interpretation process is a meaning-making process which seeks to harmonise the relationship between the individuals' life stories and their current way of life. This harmony is what makes life meaningful. Given the above, Bruner (1994) and Clandinin and Connelly (2000) posit that life is not how it was but how it is interpreted and re-interpreted, told and re-told. Resonating with Bruner (1994) and Clandinin and Connelly (2000), Jovchelovitch and Bauer (2000) observe that narratives represent how people interpret their lives and there are no meanings prior to interpretations. Thus, lives and stories can only be meaningful in and through human interactions. Life becomes meaningful once individuals' experiences have been processed to "operationalise" them through attaching meanings to them. Therefore, life is not about what or how it happened per se but it is about the meanings that one subsequently makes from what has happened. This interpretation process is affected by temporality, space and sociality which characterise narrative inquiry (Clandinin, 2013). Consequently, this means that the narratives that people live by are influenced by spaces and live in spaces and they are evident in individuals' actions, their interaction with other people, their lexicon and even what is left unsaid (Connelly & Clandinin, 1999). People make sense of their lives based on the narratives they are exposed to at any given point in their lives. Resonating with the voices of other people in narratives are human voices articulated in their social and cultural worlds.

Consequently, how people construct their narratives and the content of such narratives reveals that people are members of particular cultural groups (Webster & Mertova, 2007). How individuals thread and tell their life stories and interpret such stories are underpinned by the narrative capital at their disposal and the cultural framework they subscribe to. Life stories therefore cannot be neutral. For instance, the way the participant principals attach meaning to their leadership roles will be framed within the ambit of their cultural capital and their personal narratives which have been accumulated over the years. Some participant principals may hold the belief that effective leadership of schools remains the territory of men. In narrative interview, some participant principals may reveal that their view on gender and leadership has changed over the years through interaction with other people's narratives and their socio-cultural capital. They may reveal that initially they did not believe that women could make effective principals but later on in the interview also express their confidence in women principals. This may reveal the narratives that persuaded them to change their views.

Individual narratives are not stagnant as individuals constantly attach meanings to them. Echoing one another, Webster and Mertova (2007) and Seale, Gobo, Gubrium & Silverman (2007) assert that stories change over time and the language of stories construct human subjectivities. Such subjectivities are influenced by lifelong inclusive narrative capital. Sense-making process of narratives is a perpetual one. Narratives are characterised by fluidity which is commensurate with the non-static nature of the world, the human world. In the life story interview, through the narratives of the principals, the inquirers will be able to capture forces or agents behind the change of narratives over time and understand the perspectives of the current narratives. Such a background may enable both the participants and the inquirer to understand the anticipation regarding future outlook and projections. However, it is very important to note that in a narrative interview, the narrative inquirer comes into contact with the individuals' untold and told stories. Caine, Estefan and Clandinin (2013) are of the view that researchers need not lose sight of the fact that individuals also do live their stories in what they are not saying. This suggests that people do not only live by stories they tell but they also live by stories they do not tell. The meaning-making process embraces both told and untold stories. During the process of the inquiry, the narrative inquirers need to reach out to the "untold world" of the participants so that they engage holistically with the individual narratives. Leaving the untold untapped may culminate in incomplete or distorted co-construction of narratives and meanings. Since narrative inquiry allows the researcher to study the individuals' experiences intimately within their context and over a period of time (Clandinin & Caine,

2008), I had an advantage of observing the unfolding of untold stories by the participants. Such observation deepened my understandings of the participants' lived lives regarding their leadership of schools in rural contexts.

4.5.2 Collage Life story Elicitation Technique (CLET)

As an integrative method of inquiry, collage life story elicitation technique (CLET) afforded me the opportunity to examine the participants' lived experiences using verbal and non-verbal modes of communication (Van Schalkwyk, 2010). This suggests that collage making (non-verbal) can transcend constraints, cultural or reluctance of self-disclosure amongst others, to the telling of stories (verbal) by the participants. Thus, collage making becomes a memory trigger that enables the participants to tell their full stories thereby generating rich sources of data. Being socially interactive, the collage development becomes the avenue of meaningfully engaging with the past, the present and the future anticipations (Eisner, 2002; Weber, 2008). This characterises the holistic approach to exploring the individuals' experiences with the intention of eliciting thick memories and descriptions. Individuals are engaged in a process of co-construction of their stories for sense making. CLET is able to reveal past personal memories which have or potentially have profound meanings to individuals and impact on how these individuals currently live their lives and what they anticipate in the future (Van Schalkwyk, 2010). This suggests that these memories (narratives) become the building blocks of meaning attachments and they constitute the individuals' day-to-day realities. Individuals use such meanings to understand their worlds, relationships with others and perceptions. Given this, collage making examines what lies underneath the ostensible levels of understandings and it digs deeper into the individuals' lived experiences, perceptions about their relationships with others and events that are more likely to explain how their current reality unfolds (Van Schalkwyk, 2010). CLET takes the apparent level of understandings and meanings a step further and deeper by exploring the narratives perceived as framework within which such understandings are derived. Such a process reveals multi-layered meanings of narratives which may otherwise remain untapped.

Utilising the collage to reminisce about their life stories, people are able to represent their perceived realities, how they interpret sociocultural practices, beliefs, relationships with others and attitudes emanating from social encounters in different environments (Van Schalkwyk, 2010). Without having the individuals to tell a story about the pictures on the collage, the

collage remains silent and meaningless to the researcher. It is therefore the individual collage-prompted storytelling that makes the collage come alive with meanings. When the participant principals narrated stories about each picture on their collage, they mirrored their realities and the meanings attached to such realities in a range of contexts across their lifespans. Fundamentally, storytelling, collage-triggered in this case, becomes the vehicle through which the participant principals' lived experiences are made meaningful within a framework that intertwines their intellectual, physical and emotional facets of development across their lifetime (Van Schalkwyk, 2010). This storytelling becomes a structure that is used to examine people as social beings considering the context and content of their narratives (Bruner, 2010; McLean & Pasupathi, 2010). It then integratively configures the individual in the world and the influence of the co-constructed social selves (Van Schalkwyk, 2010). Therefore, this storytelling defines and shapes how one relates to oneself and to one's world and reality. Telling their narratives, the participant principals will be allowed to use the language they are comfortable with and tell their stories the way they choose to as original narrators (McAdams, 1993). Their language choice may grant the participants enhanced freedom of expression since they may not encounter language barriers. In the absence of language barriers, participant principals were able to elicit vivid memories and provided detailed narratives. Allowing the participants to tell their stories in their own way and everything there was to remember encouraged them to take charge which may enhance the researcher-participant relationship of trust. Imposing a pre-determined format of telling their stories may hinder the flow and cause the participants to hold back which ultimately diminishes trust.

Photographs in a collage may be chosen because they invoke some emotions (Collier & Collier, 1986). To the participant principals, such photographs may serve as the stimuli that prompts a dialogue with their inner selves resulting to intense reflections on narratives that may otherwise be unthinkable within the confines of an ordinary interview (Collier & Collier, 1986). Dialoguing with their inner selves, the participant principals may be able to connect and bring to the fore the narratives or parts of their narratives, personal or professional, that are deeply buried. This may involve revelations of traumatic experiences that individual participants may ordinarily not want to remember or talk about. Therefore, CLET appears to acknowledge that it may not be all participants who have the capacity or are prone to engage in perceived abstract conversations which characterise ordinary verbal interviews. It is through concrete means of a collage that the participant principals will be enabled to engage with abstract ideas and in some cases controversial or sensitive issues. Given this context, this technique reveals issues about

the participants' experiences that are taken for granted but which are critical to the researcher (Carlsson, 2001, Harper, 1988). Once revealed, such taken for granted issues may shed some light on the meanings the participants attach to their life stories that may otherwise remain hidden without the use of a collage. Further, the elicitation techniques, collage life story in this instance, is able to minimise skewed power relations between the narrative inquirer and the participants (Barton, 2015). Minimising power imbalances may enhance the thickness and complexity of data that participants provide without being confined to pre-determined questions.

Such imbalances accentuate that in a researcher-participant relationship, the researchers may be seen to have an upper hand since they may be perceived to be more knowledgeable than the participants are. However, with the collage-based storytelling, the participants may feel elevated to the same level as the researcher as authors of their own life stories. This will grant the participant principals enhanced control which may enhance the quality of the data generated. However, using this elicitation technique does not necessarily translate into the absolute elimination of power imbalances (Barton, 2015). Furthermore, in naturalistic contexts, the meaning constructed by the people outside such contexts may lack the enlightening capacity that it should have (Barton, 2015). Therefore, for us to obtain nuanced understandings of the naturalistic contexts, it is important to understand how people inside such naturalistic contexts conceptualise their own worlds (Barton, 2015). The participant principals' leadership narratives provided nuanced understandings of leading schools in rural contexts. Such understandings were an "insider's view from the inside". This view assisted me in comprehending the sense making process of these principals in their real life environments.

4.5.3 Artefact Inquiry

The closest connection to artefacts is found in narrative inquiry (Connelly & Clandinin, 1999). This suggests that there is compatibility between narrative inquiry and the use of artefacts. Artefacts are objects that have historical and cultural significance (Pithouse-Morgan & Laren, 2012). It is in this context that Baker (2004) argues that without artefacts there could be no recognisable human life. These are objects that people use every day so they are part of their lives. While artefacts and visual data can be visual, artefacts are any participant-chosen physical objects that are of sentimental value and visual data involves photographs, videos, paintings, drawings, cartoons and sculptures, amongst others, which may be produced by the

researcher or the participant (Banks, 2018; Thomas, 2009). Both artefacts and visual data can unearth different layers of meaning thereby adding invaluable insight into the day to day participants' lived experiences (Barbour, 2014). Unearthing such layers of meaning may further evoke emotions and memories which otherwise would have been left untapped.

Artefacts are perceived differently by different people in different contexts depending on their cultural and historical backgrounds. Participants may choose the same artefact but such artefact may evoke different emotions or narratives and thus, individuals may attach a diverse range of meanings to such artefacts. This indicates that artefacts represent the uniqueness of different individual life stories. To this end, artefacts may trigger memories (Martin & Merrotsky, 2006) which may otherwise not be easily accessible to the researcher. The participant principals told their stories based on what the artefacts in question reminded them of and the emotions they evoked. This involved participant principals revealing the meanings they constructed about the artefacts-prompted stories in relation to their naturalistic contexts. Acknowledging that the artefacts are reservoirs of individuals' experiences (Martin & Merrotsky, 2006), Connelly and Clandinin (1999) observe that the objects that individuals choose are able to, through inquirer-researcher interactive engagements, reach out to the bottommost part of the individuals' reservoir of experiences. The storytelling that the artefacts induce become the critical component of the individuals' life story which may be elicited through the life story interview. This made the individual narratives whole.

Furthermore, artefacts are both a record of historical events and a medium through which their meanings and their use going forward are transmitted (McDonald, Le, Higgins & Podmore, 2005). Artefacts are linked to the individuals' timeline. Therefore, the meanings attached to such artefacts are individualised and inevitably context-embedded. Since the researcher intends to understand the participants' lived experiences over a given period, artefacts can make revelations about the past which may not be revealed by any other means other than artefacts (Martin & Merrotsky, 2006). Some individual narratives can only be traced and become accessible to the researcher through employing artefacts. This suggests that artefacts are concrete residues of people's experiences which are given life and meaning by individual stories. Consequently, the range of artefacts chosen may tap into various faculties of the individuals' repositories of experiences that may otherwise remain untapped. This may enhance the quality of the narrative data generated. Further making this possible is that, with the artefacts, the participants choose how to tell their own stories and the participants' choices

and purposes take precedence over those of the researcher (Connelly & Clandinin, 1999). Martin and Merrotsy (2006) concur with Connelly & Clandinin (1999) in that, with the use of artefacts, the participants take charge which determines the direction the conversation will take on the basis of the artefacts chosen and how they are presented. This is contrary to the traditional scenario where the researcher dominates the conversation and uses questions that shape the direction of the structured interview. Such a setting, unlike the traditional interview setting, appeals to the participants to express themselves more freely. This freedom may culminate in the conversation reaching unprecedented and significant depths of experience.

Having the participants to lead the artefacts-triggered conversation may perform the balancing act in terms of power relations between the researcher and the participants (Gotschi, Delve & Freyer, 2009; Singh, 2011). This may prevent the researcher from having an upper hand in the research-participant relationship which may strengthen much-needed trust between the two parties. These artefacts-prompted conversations may trigger a range of emotions to the participants (Pithouse-Morgan & van Laren, 2012). Exploring such emotions, I was able to deepen my insights regarding the phenomenon under study (Pithouse-Morgan & van Laren, 2012); the dynamics of leading in rural contexts. Individuals are emotionally attached to their artefacts therefore the researcher needs to capture the meanings suggested by artefact-induced emotions. However, I believe that researchers need to handle such emotionally charged sessions with caution and be considerate of the participants' feelings. It is in this vein that individuals utilise artefacts to develop their considered features of their identities, which enables them to generally deal with their emotions, behaviours and actions (Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner & Cain, 1995) OR 1998?. This suggests that people identify themselves with their own artefacts. Artefacts are identity-laden. They are perceived to define the identities of individuals and how they relate to themselves and their own worlds. As a researcher, I did not impose artefacts on or choose artefacts for the participant primary school principals since this might not represent who they are and their life stories or their lived leadership narratives.

All the life story interviews, collage inquiry and artefact inquiry were conducted at the participant schools between February 2018 and July 2018. Each session of each data generation method lasted for about one to one and half hours. I used the digital voice recorder and a cell phone to record all the sessions and data were stored in these same devices as well as a USB flash drive. Participants used mostly English and in some cases they used IsiZulu. Data were transcribed verbatim and I translated the IsiZulu expressions that were used. Audio recording

of sessions and transcribing data verbatim ensured that the accounts of participants experiences were accurately captured (Cohen et al., 2011).

4.6 Data analysis

Without analysis, narratives used as data are silent as they do not automatically communicate meanings. Consequently, engaging in the narrative inquiry process does not only involve generating stories from the participants however, it also involves analysis (Savin-Baden & van Niekerk, 2007). This indicates that the recounting of experiences is not enough. Narrative inquiry needs to go beyond the mere recounting of stories to interpretation of such stories. This ensures that narrative inquiry does not degenerate into an anthology of narrative accounts. Analysis of data, which were the participants' stories, was double-pronged involving: narrative analysis and analysis of narratives. The former refers to organising a series of accounts of events, actions and incidents (as data) into plots in order to produce meaningful stories (Polkinghorne, 1995; McCormack, 2004). This narrative analysis becomes a reflective explanatory account which connects the thread of past events to explain how specific outcomes may have come into being (Polkinghorne, 1995). It is argued that individuals' experiences do not necessarily follow a chronological order with a plot or structured storyline neatly organised into the beginning, the middle and the end (Savin-Baden & van Niekerk, 2007). Resonating with Savin-Baden and van Niekerk (2007), Caine, Estefan and Clandinin (2013) assert that life, as it is lived, is not neat, tidy and formulaic. Instead, narratives are interruptions of reflection in the individuals' storied lives. To this end, this mode of analysis (narrative analysis) involves arranging data (events, actions and incidents) chronologically, creating structured storylines (process of emplotment) and combining the plots to produce a coherent, meaningful whole. This process is referred to as re-storying the stories (Clandinin, 2013). Given the above, the tool I used to configure the plots of participants' narratives in order to construct a coherent narrative is concept mapping (Butler-Kisber & Poldma, 2010). Concept mapping visually conceptualises or restructures ideas from the research texts being analysed thereby reducing texts into a sequence of phrases which are meaningfully linked in the form of diagrams and symbols (Butler-Kisber & Poldma, 2010). Read together with texts, concept maps juxtaposes the visual and the voice together as a vehicle through which plots are configured relationally (Poldma, 2006). However, concept map does not become an autonomous method of analysis (Butler-Kisber & Poldma, 2010). Research texts were reduced into a relational series of meaningful plots in the form of schematic representations.

In this study, each participant principal's series of events and actions (data) were organised into a chronological order, developed into plots using concept mapping. Thereafter, these plots were re-storied through synthesising them into a coherent story framework that made sense. In essence, I analysed the narratives of the participant school principals and re-storied them into a meaningful whole. Further, creating the chronological framework, narratives were structured into the beginning, the middle and the end featuring the past, the present and the future (Gibbs, 2007). This requires the researcher to engage retrospectively with data in order to embrace the temporal nature of the human narratives. It is in this context that the re-storying affords the researchers the opportunity to move forward and backward, inward and outward and keep our knowing always located in place(s) (Caine, Estefan & Clandinin, 2013). This suggests that for the researchers to ascertain the underlying meanings of the present narratives of leading in rural contexts, they need to go back to the past, from the past to the present and utilise both to understand the principals' future anticipated narratives.

The latter, analysis of narratives, is a scientific mode of analysis (Marshall & Case, 2010) which is also called paradigmatic analysis (Polkinghorne, 1995). This mode of analysis seeks to identify the themes and categories that appear common or to vary across a range of the participants' narratives (Polkinghorne, 1995). Paradigmatic analysis does not only identify themes and categories but it also highlights the relationship amongst the themes and categories that have been identified (Polkinghorne, 1995). From the re-storied stories of the participants, I distinguished themes and categories that commonly and varyingly run across the landscape of participants' stories. I then subsequently discovered how such categories and concepts were related to one another. Therefore, this approach to analysis moves from stories to common and varying components or features within such stories (Polkinghorne, 1995). This indicates that in this type of analysis narratives become the research data (Smeyers & Verhesschen, 2001). Further, paradigmatic analysis needs an archive comprising a range of individual stories instead of just one story (Polkinghorne, 1995). It was within this range of stories that the researcher discovered common threads and diverging thematic and conceptual manifestations. Since I used life story interview, collage life story elicitation technique and artefacts, each participant was able to generate a number of stories as research data regarding their lived experiences of leading rural primary schools. Ultimately, I had a database of participants' stories to be analysed through paradigmatic analysis. In light of the above, through deployment of thematic analysis, themes and concepts were inductively derived from generated narratives as data (Polkinghorne, 1995; Vaismoradi, Turunen & Bondas, 2013). This means that the type of

approach I used in paradigmatic analysis was inductive analysis since I took categories and concepts emerging from data instead of taking categories and concepts from previous research (Polkinghorne, 1995).

4.7 Ethical considerations

This section presents the ethical considerations as follows: procedural ethics, ethics in the field and ethics in writing the research study.

4.7.1 Procedural ethics

Research ethics focuses on the orthodox standards which are set to govern the behaviour of the researchers in their interaction with the participants (Rule & John, 2011). Therefore, the researchers' practices need to be premised on such ethical standards (de Vos, Strydom, Fouche & Delport, 2011). Research that is conducted within the ambit of the sound ethical principles enhances the quality of research and contributes to its trustworthiness since ethical practices are crucial factors of quality research (Rule & John, 2011). It is of vital importance that the research processes mirror the canons of conventionally accepted research practice. To this end, I observed the pertinent research protocols.

For the prospective participants to be able to grant me their informed consent, I informed them about, *inter alia*, the researcher's identity and the duration of participation (Smythe & Murray, 2000), that they are being researched, the nature of the study, and that they have a right to withdraw from the study at any time (Seale, Gobo, Gubrium & Silverman, 2007; Rule & John, 2011). I ensured that the granting of the informed consent was voluntary and it was devoid of any undue influence or coercion (Smythe & Murray, 2000). The researcher asked the participants to consent to participating in the study without using any deception to secure such participation (Rule & John, 2011). Intentionally misleading the prospective participants about the nature and purpose of the research annuls the logic behind voluntary, informed consent. This may also compromise the quality of research.

I applied for permission to conduct research in the participant schools from the KwaZulu-Natal Provincial Department of Basic Education. Gaining access to the schools, I also secured permission from the principals to undertake research in their schools. Before I embarked on my research journey, I applied for ethical clearance from the University of KwaZulu-Natal.

4.7.2 Ethics in the field

Narrative inquiry is a relational methodology so ethical issues take centre stage throughout the research process (Clandinin & Caine, 2008): at the beginning of the research, as the researcher-participant relationship is unfolding and in the representation of participants in the research texts (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006). This study explores the narratives of leadership of school principals in rural contexts therefore, I conceptualised ethics as being about negotiation, respect, mutuality and openness to multiple voices (Clandinin, 2006). As a narrative inquirer, I negotiated my entry, my exit and my representation of participants' experiences. Narrative inquiry may be perceived to be intrusive since it deals with people's stories or lived experiences, as a result I engaged cautiously and showed respect towards the participants. I highlighted and promoted the importance of mutuality and openness as we engaged and co-constructed meanings to the generated stories.

4.7.3 Ethics in writing the research study

I communicated clearly to the participants that I would protect their rights to privacy through ensuring confidentiality and anonymity (Smythe & Murray, 2000). Therefore, I did not reveal the names of research sites and the names of participants. In the study, pseudonyms were used (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011) instead of real names so that names of individual participants and sites are not identifiable in the study. This means that the real names of the participant principals and those of their schools were not to be published. The data generated was only to be used for research purposes. Further, throughout the research process, the researcher reasonably ensured that the participants were not exposed to any harm (non-maleficence) (Rule & John, 2011). Instead, adhering to the principle of beneficence, the researcher explicated the possible benefits of the study and participation thereof. One such benefit is that narrative inquiry is potentially able to put them on the terrain of transforming the primary schools they are leading. However, some potential harm can be unanticipated (Smythe & Murray, 2000). This meant that as a researcher I was ready for any eventuality regarding shielding the participants from any physical, psychological or emotional harm.

4.8 Ensuring trustworthiness

Ensuring trustworthiness is critical to a qualitative study. While the criteria for trustworthiness in a qualitative study involves addressing issues of credibility, transferability, dependability

and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985); in narrative inquiry, the trustworthiness criteria are apparency, verisimilitude and transferability (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990).

Apparency can be considered in terms of how the reader makes sense of the details and the degree of recognition of someone's life (France, 2010). The study needs to be comprehensible to the audience thereby becoming audience-friendly. With such comprehensibility the audience will be able to recognise their own life worlds and those of others in the study. To ensure that the above happens, I generated thick narratives as data, which were enhanced by establishing sound relationships of trust with the participant principals through visiting their schools before any life story interviews were conducted. Rich details and revealing descriptions by the participants enable the readers and researchers to augment their understandings of the study and how it relates to their own worlds or the extent to which they identify themselves with the phenomenon under study. I also provided a detailed account of my methodological choices and justifications for such choices so that the reader or researcher understands the research processes involved. Other than using the life story interviews to generate participant principals' stories, I also used the collage life story elicitation technique and artefacts. These multiple sources of data provided me with thick descriptions. Furthermore, in the research report I provided key quotes from the participants' stories for the reader to independently understand the participants' meanings and make their own parallel links to reality. In this vein, apparency is considered to mean "visible or obvious" (Pepper & Wildy, 2009). The study needs to be visible as this may enhance its consumability.

Verisimilitude is considered to be one of the criteria for a good scholarly study in which writing seems "real" and "alive" transporting the reader directly into the world of the study (Creswell, 2007, p. 250). Achieving verisimilitude, the study must "ring true", it must have believability; where "audiences must experience a congruence with their own experiences of similar, parallel or analogous situations (Blumenfield-Jones, 1995, p. 31). This is similar to the criterion that Lincoln and Guba (1985) refer to as credibility. Verisimilitude enables the consumers of the study to vicariously experience the similar phenomena and empathise with the participants of the study regarding their (participants') decisions (Loh, 2013). Given this, Pepper and Wildy (2009) view verisimilitude as the study's "life-likeness." Enabling the consumers to understand the study in this fashion constitutes audience validation which involves those whom the study is about (Kvale, 2007; Loh, 2013). To that end, verisimilitude makes it possible for others to have access not only to our lives when our stories are about them but also to the lives of others

(Eisner, 1997). To address this criterion, the life story interviews were recorded in order to capture the narrative accounts of the participant principals accurately. I then gave the transcripts of the stories to the participants to authenticate whether the transcribed version was a representation of their original leadership narrative accounts. This is called member checking (Creswell, 2009). I gave my research report to my two critical friends who have a degree of Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) so that they check the rigour of the research processes. To elicit thick descriptions of the lived leadership narratives of the participant principals, I assured them that their identities were concealed and the data were only used for research purposes and most importantly, that all narratives were admissible as data.

Transferability is the degree to which the findings of the study can apply or be transferred beyond the bounds of the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The findings of the study need to be meaningful to the readers who were not participants in the study and those readers need to be able to relate the findings to their own contexts and experiences. This is similar to what Loh (2013) refers to as "utility" which Reissman (2008) considers to be the "ultimate test" that determines whether a narrative inquiry becomes the basis for the work of other researchers. I provided adequate contextual information about the participant school principals and research sites through the profiling of both the participants and the research sites. Thick description can contribute to addressing this criterion since it is through a thick description of context and the actions embedded within that context, that the answers generated and meanings made may be transferred to a different but yet similar context (Loh, 2013). I kept the transcripts of the participants' narrative accounts and the documents of narrative analysis and analysis of narrative and were to be made available to other researchers on request. I further provided a detailed account of the principals' leadership narratives in rural contexts thereby enabling the reader or researcher to contrast the features of the phenomenon studied with what they have observed in their own contexts (Shenton, 2004).

4.9 Limitations of the study

Time constraints and access to the participants of the study, amongst others, are some of the limitations that may impact on the processes of the study. Researchers need to anticipate such eventualities and indicate how such issues will be addressed (Maree, 2013) to minimise or eliminate their impact on the study findings. Furthermore, if the researcher acknowledges the limitations, it enables the readers or other researchers to appreciate the constraints imposed on

the research project and understand the findings in the context in which they are made (Vithal & Jansen, 2010). Since the participants of this study are school principals, I anticipated that in some cases I might not be able to engage them during school hours. In such instances, I scheduled our appointments after school hours. Given this, though this research project utilised four quintile one rural primary schools, I purposively selected five rural primary schools in case of any eventuality. Further, this is a small scale but intensive study which involves four primary school principals in rural contexts. Consequently, the findings of the study may not be generalised over other primary school principals in rural contexts other than the participant principals. It is my contention that the findings of this study will contribute to the body of scientific knowledge regarding the primary school principals' narratives of leading in rural contexts.

4.10 Chapter conclusion

This chapter has presented an outline regarding how this study was conducted. It has presented the research design which serves as a blueprint for the conduct of this research project. Thereafter, the chapter has dealt with methodological issues involving the selection of research participants and sites, methods of generating data and how such data were analysed. It has also clearly stated how ethical protocols were observed and how trustworthiness issues were addressed. The chapter concludes by presenting the limitations of this research project. Without this blueprint, it may become an inevitable eventuality to find that the focus of the study has been derailed. A derailed focus means that the study fails to achieve what it has set out to achieve, particularly to respond to the research puzzles of the study.

The next chapter presents the first level of analysis of the school principals' narratives.

CHAPTER FIVE

NARRATIVES OF SCHOOL PRINCIPALS

5.1 Introduction

Chapter Four presented the research design and methodology employed in this study. The interpretivist paradigm, which is the paradigm within which this study is positioned, was discussed. This study being qualitative in nature, the narrative inquiry methodology and methods were presented. Additionally, the double-pronged data analysis process, involving re-storying the participants' leadership narratives (narrative analysis) and the analysis of narratives which identified common themes across narratives, was explained. The focus and purpose of this chapter is to re-story the narratives of participant principals and configure emplotments in order to compose a coherent story. This chapter presents the narrative analysis which is the first level of analysis. This refers to the re-storying the narratives of the four participant principals thereby capturing their lived experiences. This level of analysis draws on the narratives born out of the life story interview, collage inquiry and artefact inquiry. Re-storying the narratives, I commence with Ms Assertive of Focus Primary School, followed by Ms Passionate of Work Primary School. After these, I present Mr Communist of Dedicated Primary School and lastly, Ms Elegant of Glamour Primary School. Concept mapping was used as a tool to identify plots across presentation of school principals' narratives (refer to Chapter 4, pp. 19-20).

5.2 Ms Assertive's narrative: Woman on a mission

Displayed below are the collage and the artefact of Ms Assertive which represent her early life and lived leadership experiences. She is a woman on a mission because she believes that even after having been the school principal since 2010 she is still the woman on a mission because she believes she still has a great deal to achieve at her school. This means her leadership mission has not been accomplished yet.

In our engagements, Ms Assertive struck me as a woman who is bold, determined and decisive; a woman who remains steadfast in her vision and pursuit of objectives she has set for herself hence the name "Ms Assertive."

5.2.1 Dusty beginnings

I was born on 24 June 1969 at Umlazi Township in Durban, in KwaZulu-Natal Province, South Africa. This township was established as a result of the apartheid policies. It was built exclusively for Africans during the apartheid regime. I strongly believe in God and prayer which helps me. I leave everything to God. Though my parents were married, my mother lived at Ndwedwe while my father lived at Umlazi and worked at a furniture shop around Durban. I lived with my mother at Ndwedwe; a very deep rural area. My mother was *labomama okuthiwa alufakwa* (a very strict woman) while my father was friendly. The three-legged pot reminds me of who I am and where I come from as it was used then to prepare our meals. It represents my family structure which then comprised of my father, my mother and us, children. At the age of five until fifteen I went to live with my uncle and aunt at Kranskop, a very rural area then in northern KwaZulu-Natal.

Figure 5. 1: Ms Assertive's collage

After primary school, I went back to my mother at Ndwedwe to do standard six, seven and eight (today grades 8, 9 & 10). Thereafter, I went back to Umlazi to complete grades 11 and 12 since my school did not offer these grades. While I was doing grade 10 I fell pregnant. My mother wanted me to drop school and get married while my father was happy with my choice of returning to school. My father passed on while I was doing matric which I passed.

5.2.2 Diploma in the bag

For me to be able to register at Umbumbulu College of Education my mother had to sell a cow. At that point, my brother was busy with preparations of sending *abakhongi* (go-betweens) to pay *ilobolo* (very loosely translated to bride price) to his in-laws. During the week on which I received an acceptance letter from the college, it was the same weekend on which *abakhongi* were to start *ilobolo* negotiations. My brother had to cancel and tell his in-laws that the *ilobolo*

money was to be used for my college fees. Hence, I hail my brother as a hero. My brother bought me everything I needed for college. During the first term I was awarded a bursary which I used until I completed at college.

5.2.3 Sombre moments

After college I met a man of my dreams at Umlazi; who paid *ilobolo* and brought *umembeso* (gifts from the groom's family to the in-laws) to my family. Sadly, I lost my fiancé to cancer. He was buried on the day on which we were to be married. It was a painful experience for me such that I went for professional therapy hence I am still scared of being involved again. My family provided the support framework which I needed, particularly my brother and my older sister. We would cry together. Though I am a woman of prayer but at that time I could not even pray. My artefact, the three-legged pot, also reminds of another sad moment in my life which was the death of my grandmother. Heart-breaking as it was, I am equally reminded that she was my source of wisdom; the wisdom which made me who I am today.

5.2.4 Joining the noble fraternity

I started working in 1997 as a teacher at Insuze, a rural area outside uThongathi in KwaZulu-Natal Province. During my eighth year the Department of Education introduced Rationalisation and Redeployment, popularly known as R and R; a system which redeployed excess teachers to schools which were in need. My colleague and I were identified as excess at the school. In the midst of the due processes of being transferred to other schools, I approached my principal whom we regarded as a father as we could speak about anything with him. I initiated the idea that we introduce Computer Literacy at the school, which other schools in the area did not offer in order to attract and maintain enrolment thereby avoid R and R. The principal bought the idea. I kick-started the process of sourcing computers. Old Mutual sponsored the school with 12 computers. As envisaged, learners came back and we were saved from moving to other schools.

5.2.5 Swelling the leadership ranks

During my 10th year I decided to apply for a Head of Department (HOD) post beyond my school though I did not put my heart into it. I was called for an interview, which was my first. I passed the interview. I was appointed as the HOD. I believe it was God's miracle because I did not bring my ID to the interview, which was a requirement I did not know about then; and the interview committee forgot to ask for it.

I assumed duty as the HOD at a new school around Appelsbosch in July 2006. This was my first leadership position. My old school being a successful school, I considered my principal to be my role model therefore I emulated his leadership when I started. Assuming duties as Foundation Phase HOD, I observed that my new principal was too soft as he would allow teachers to do as they pleased. There were conflicts and the school was divided. The Intermediate and Senior Phase HOD was not dedicated to his work. He would abandon his classes and remain in his car for hours on end. If my principal and I were not at school he would dismiss the school early. However, my foundation phase teachers refused to be dismissed before time and they would remain behind. This fuelled the conflicts in the school.

5.2.6 Ascending the throne to the apex

Amidst such conflicts, my principal unexpectedly resigned. Since there was no deputy principal, one of us (HODs) had to act as a school principal. After the circuit manager engaged us, it became clear that we both wanted to act. Therefore, the circuit manager told us that the SGB would have to interview both my male peer and me. Hearing that we both have to be interviewed, my male peer immediately submitted a letter to the circuit manager which appeared to have been written long before our engagements with the circuit manager. In the letter he was asking for a transfer to another school. I believe he thought I was not going to contest. Then, there was no need for the interviews since he was then leaving the school. I assumed duty as the acting school principal.

5.2.7 Blowing the winds of change

Given the internal politics and divisions, my first responsibility was to unite the school. I was aware they did not like me particularly those who were loyal to my male peer who left the school. Regardless, I treated them equally and changed their attitudes. Staff was even divided according to union lines; it was South African Democratic Teachers' Union (SADTU) versus National Teachers' Union (NATU) because either side claimed to be better than the other. I worked tirelessly to educate them that they are teachers before they are union members and both unions are fighting for the same cause hence the need to remain united. Now if a SADTU members attends a workshop or a meeting, on their return they cascade relevant information to all teachers irrespective of affiliation and NATU do likewise. If a NATU member sings a NATU song, SADTU members join the singing and dancing. This encourages team spirit which I preach. Thus the three-legged pot triggers the conviction that teamwork is very crucial for school effectiveness.

5.2.8 Vision and mission

To ensure every stakeholder understood the direction the school was taking, I articulated the vision and mission of the school which was already in existence and what exactly needs to be done to achieve that. The vision and mission was communicated to the learners, parents and teachers. To this date, in every parents meeting, I bring along the flag that bears the vision and mission of the school to constantly remind parents about our direction and their role en-route that direction. Teachers need to make sure that they post it in their files and their classrooms, and conscientise learners about it. In the assembly learners are also conscientised about the vision so that everyone is on the same page regarding what the school is doing and why it is being done. Policies collectively formulated with the SMT or SGB are taken to the teachers for their inputs.

5.2.9 Home-brewed for home realities

Making school vibrant and healthy, I introduced some extra-curricular activities, one of which is English Speech contest. Having our neighbouring secondary schools complaining that we are feeding them learners who are neither able to express themselves nor construct sentences in English also prompted us to start this programme. Sometimes policymakers formulate education policies that do not respond to our realities on the ground. To this end, I still argue that teaching foundation phase in IsiZulu without them being introduced to English is a recipe for an educational disaster since at grade four they do not understand a word of English. At grade four, they cannot construct even a single sentence in English, let alone spelling and understanding questions. Being the foot soldiers, instead of complaining we introduced English in the foundation phase. Though it started with our school, English contest was subsequently adopted by our entire cluster comprising 7 schools. At circuit level, I am the leader of that programme. We hold competitions twice or thrice a year. Our learners are still leading the pack. We encourage learners to practice speaking English as we believe that if they can speak, it may be easy to write. We organise English related activities for our assembly with different grades taking turns to participate on different days.

Learners may present poems, dialogue, storytelling, news bulletins and debates. Assembly time is not enough, so on curriculum days the entire school gathers at the hall for our contest activities. The Provincial Department of Environmental Affairs runs a School Environmental Programme (SEEP). Through this programme they administer a "Junior Land Care Competition." We were invited to enter this competition. Our learners entered the debate, poem

and poster categories. Learners came from different backgrounds: Indian, African, Coloured and white. Competition proceedings were conducted in English. At district level, in the debate we obtained position one out of 6 schools and in the speech category we obtained first position out of 20 schools. At provincial level, there were 12 districts with 12 schools in each category. We obtained first and third positions in speech and debate categories respectively out of 12 districts. To this end, I strongly believe that our programmes are bearing fruit.

5.2.10 Invoking community agency and tackling the social ills head-on

We faced a challenge of learner absenteeism and late coming. I decided to enlist the support of the community involving traditional leadership, members of the clergy and political leadership. In this rural area traditional leadership is accorded respect therefore I believe they have a role to play in their school and the education of the community children. Therefore this means, if one leg of the three-legged pot does not function, it compromises the functionality of the entire pot. These three legs need to support one another. We asked *izinduna* (headmen) *and amakhosi* (chiefs) to preach the educational gospel in their community meetings since the school is part of the community. The school must be seen to be working with the community and not for the community. Curbing late coming is a teachers' responsibility but also equally a community responsibility. Therefore, I encouraged traditional leadership to intervene and not to keep quiet when they see learners running late or loitering during school hours. I urged pastors and other church leaders to preach the same educational gospel since our learners and their parents are patrons of different churches in the community. Community leaders, particularly councillors were asked to spread the same in their meetings with their constituencies. By so doing, learners begin to realise that their parents and the entire community are "singing from the same hymn book." I remember the engagements we had with *Inkosi* (Chief) regarding the above. It went as follows:

Ms Assertive: *Nkosi*, the school belongs to and it serves this community. There need to be partnership between the school and the community since the community benefits from what the school produces. The community needs to take ownership of the school to minimise some of the external challenges.

Inkosi : We can't agree with you more. What challenges do you contend with?

Ms Assertive: Challenges we face include learner absenteeism, late coming, vandalising of

school property and burglary.

Inkosi : In community meetings, I will preach the gospel of the importance of education, being at school every day and being punctual. I will also tell the community to be vigilant and protect their school with everything they have. It is the only hope we have of changing our plight. *Ngizotshela nezinduna zami* (I will instruct my headmen), councillors and pastors to preach the same gospel in their meetings with the people and to their congregations. I will send izinduna to school to address learners on different social-ills.

Ms Assertive: This is the beginning of a school-community partnership that is very critical if the school is to be effective. *Ngibonga ngiyanconcoza Nkosi* (Thank you very much Chief).

The school is not properly fenced and the security we hire has not been effective; with some quitting from time to time citing low salary. Hence the school also faced a challenge of vandalism and burglary. However, after roping in the community and leaders of different sectors within the community, break-ins at the school have since stopped as this is the fifth year since our last break-in. Just last December 2017 there was no security but the school was neither vandalised nor broken into. In some cases we invite these leaders to the school to address learners on matters affecting the children and the school in particular as well as the community in general. Each year we organise a function where we invite these community leaders and we give them slots to address various issues ranging from educational to cultural issues. By so doing the community takes ownership of the school. Bringing the entire community on board is really working for the school.

Further, some learners use scholar transport since they travel long distances. Walking long distances to school contributed to learner absenteeism. This also impacts adversely on our enrolment. Scholar transport consists of three buses which should be used by my school. Our neighbouring school is a secondary school. However, I negotiated with the Department of Basic Education to say it would be insensitive and not make logic to have two learners from the same family, one in primary school and one in secondary school; with one travelling by bus and the other walking to school respectively. I asked the Department to give one bus to our

neighbouring secondary school and leave us with two buses. This helped us to minimise late coming, absenteeism and it positively influenced our enrolment.

5.2.11 Making it work despite adversities

My three-legged pot consciously reminds me that I lead a rural no fee paying primary school with learners who come from poverty-stricken family backgrounds and communities. These learners rely on the school nutrition programme to put a plate on the table; let alone their other basic school needs. It also triggers the reality that it is made of steel, it is strong and black. Even if you put it on fire it does not break easily, it does not become "dirty" on the outside and it remains black. As a leader I remain steadfast and resilient and encourage teachers to remain strong, focused and committed to producing good results despite adversities. Like this pot, my leadership cannot be changed by my day to day school actualities. Being a no fee school, we do have resource challenges. Our only reliable source of revenue is the public funding which is too little for our school operations. The delay regarding the transfer of school allocations to the school's bank account adversely impacts on school operations. The school only receives its allocation around June. Operationalising the budget, from the lists submitted by HODs (today DH), as Finance Committee (Fincom) we prioritise what the school needs the most. Currently, our bank balance is very low. Each term we use more than R8000 for day to day consumables like ink toners and stationery depending on the demand per term. I have enlisted the support of a company that has assisted us for quite some time now. That company provided us with a science kit and learner uniform, amongst others. Uniform sponsorship comes in handy as many learners are poor, they live with their grandmothers and some even come to school on empty tummies. This company has also paid for some infrastructure improvements that you see like paving part of the school premises; it was not public funding. We have started buying on credit. I have negotiated with an Indian shop owner to provide us with what we need to keep operations going. On receiving our funds, we have to repay all our debts.

Figure 5. 2: Ms Assertive's artefact

The school has three state-paid support staff: one security, one cleaner and one administration clerk. In terms of the Post Provisioning Norm (PPN) I have full complement of the staff. PPN is the school staffing model used by the Department to allocate academic posts to schools based on the school enrolment. Conversely, in reality this PPN-informed staff complement does not address our day to day actualities. Our classes are overcrowded due to inadequate human resources, not because of insufficient floor space. There is only one class that has 37 learners. Other classes range between the 40s and 70s. This compromises and overburdens teachers with day to day marking of either departmental workbooks or learners' exercise books. Though we have a functional library, it is not that up to scratch. It does have books, though not enough, many of which were won by our learners in competitions.

5.2.12 Only yearning for quality

To ensure that our school provides quality I lead by example, I lead from the front. I live the gospel I preach by honouring my periods if I am at school. I make it my mission that every teacher is at school, in class, prepared and teaching. I believe that learners have a better chance of performing if they are taught by a well-prepared teacher. Though not on daily basis, I check both learners' and teachers' work including lesson plans and files. Teachers submit to their HODs and HODs submit to me. I also submit my file to my HOD. We have announced and unannounced days on which I check teachers' files using a management tool. The tool that I like the most is our monthly management tool. HODs use this tool to collate information on, *inter alia*, lesson plans, marking of learner exercise books or homework, regarding what is available or not available on each submission. At the end of each month, HODs submit this tool to me. From the monthly management tool data, I am able to gather who is on track, who is lagging behind or who needs support. HODs keep records of their engagements with the teachers. After consulting them, I do unannounced visits to classes where the management tool data suggests that there are areas of concern or some protocols are breached. This is why I brief new teachers at our school about policies and culture even if they are not new to this fraternity so that they know what is expected of them. We sit together as a staff and organise our files with HODs providing teachers with documents they need. After that, in the spirit of teamwork which is one of our values, I sometimes join the teachers who remain behind after school to proceed with their work. I invite them for a round of drinks to de-stress and appreciate what they are doing. As we are about to conduct our first term assessment, we drew up our assessment programme last year (2017) which teachers submitted to HODs during the first two

weeks into the academic school year. I give assessments to the clerk to duplicate in advance so that we are ready for any eventuality like power outages or unavailability of stationery. This enhances commitment of the teachers to teaching and learning as they can only assess what they have covered. To this end there may be no one who lags behind in terms of prescribed coverage.

5.3 Mr Communist's narrative: A future of possibilities

Mr Communist's collage and artefacts (artefact 1 and artefact 2) are represented below. His storied narrative draws on the collage and artefacts. From our engagements throughout the data generation sessions, it became very clear that this participant was politically active and he once occupied the leadership echelons of a teacher union, South African Democratic Teachers' Union (SADTU). Hence, I gave him the name "Mr Communist."

Despite Mr Communist's indigent background, being raised by a single mother in a polygamous household, attending poorly resourced rural schools, shattered childhood dreams; he remained steadfast and rose above adversities through consciously and successfully pursuing one of many possibilities. In the midst of adversities, he sees opportunities he can exploit to his advantage.

Figure 5. 3: Mr Communist's collage

5.3.1 Being rurally rooted

I was born in 1964 at Ogunjini at Ndwedwe, a very rural area outside Durban, in KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) Province, South Africa. In terms of the apartheid policies, this area was exclusively designated for Africans. My father had three wives who were all housewives. My mother was the third wife. The reason for my father's polygamy was that the first two wives did not give birth to a boy child who would become an heir. Traditionally, this was an issue at the time. My father worked for the then Thongathi Town Board (TTB) and he was the only breadwinner at home. In the main, we earned our living by planting different crops for own consumption. The bedspread and knitted scarf (my artefacts) trigger the memory that as a hobby initially, my mother sewed bed linen and knitted jerseys for the family. She used a knitting machine my father bought her. Later on, given the poverty we contended with, this hobby became our source of income and our only means of survival as a family. From a distance, my home was a very big traditional homestead which could be perceived as a well to do family but getting closer, one could smell poverty. All houses were built of mud. I have four siblings and a number of others from my other two mothers who are all girls. Being the eldest boy in my mother's house, culturally I belonged to *umamkhulu's* (my father's first wife) house because she did not have boys.

Figure 5. 4: Mr Communist's artefact one

Figure 5. 5: Mr Communist's artefact two

I started my primary school education at a Roman Catholic school because we are Catholics at home. This school was located at Verulam, a town outside Durban in KZN Province; a suburban locale far away from home. We had to travel long distances to and from school. It was a better resourced school as it was run by the Roman Catholic Church nuns, mostly from Germany. *Umamkhulu* (my father's first wife) was a *sangoma* (traditional healer) so she had some income. From grade one to grade five (in today's terms) she paid for my school fees and everything else I needed as a child. My father passed on around 1975 while I was doing

standard three (grade five). The death of my father while doing standard five was a painful experience since I enjoyed having my father around. Suddenly, *umamkhulu* stopped maintaining me.

5.3.2 Reality hits home

With *umamkhulu* no longer supporting me, I began to feel the pinch as my clothes were worn out and I did not have school shoes and pants. I remember that I struggled with shoes after grade five to such an extent that in grade ten I had to wear my father's shoes which were size 8 while I take size 6. However, my artefacts remind me that though my family was poor, I always had a jersey for winter because my mother was good at knitting. In order to support us my mother found temporary jobs and did domestic work for Indians in Verulam. As per apartheid legislation, Verulam was an area designated for Indians. Later on she was hired as a cleaner at some flat at Umdloti beach. I joined my mother working as a garden boy for Indian families in Verulam earning R1 a day and later on I worked around La Lucia on Saturdays. Umdloti Beach and La Lucia were apartheid designated, affluent white suburbs. My mother left her job in the early 1990s. She started sewing bedspreads and other bed linen as well as knitting scarves which she sold at different pension pay-out points. We also sold these wares during weekends. This is how my mother raised us. I admire her for being strong, extraordinary and committed to us particularly after my father's death. My father wanted me to be a lawyer so my mother was under pressure to fulfil my father's wish. I was very bright at school. I was always part of the top five. I was also good at different sports.

5.3.3 From high school to temporary work

Unfortunately, after passing form three (grade 10), the school was changed to be a girls' seminary. I had to find another school. I went to a rural school *komalume* (my mother's family), KwaSwayimane, where my mother comes from to do form four (grade 11) and form five (grade 12) in 1982 and 1983 respectively. KwaSwayimane is a rural area outside Pietermaritzburg in KZN Province which the apartheid regime set aside for Africans. I chose commerce stream. This rural secondary school struggled to get qualified teachers. Our Maths, Accounting and English teachers were boys who had passed matric at the same school the previous year. Moreover, comparatively speaking, the physical infrastructure and resources were a challenge. We started study groups, teaching one another. There was no Economics and Business Economics teacher. While there was also absolutely no Accounting teacher in standard ten (grade 12) but we passed it through our each one, teach group initiative. Nonetheless, ambitious

as I was but contrary to my father's dream, I wanted to be a Chartered Accountant (CA). I applied for admission to the University of Fort Hare and University of the Witwatersrand which were my first and second choice respectively.

Out of two hundred learners who wrote matric, only twenty three passed. I was one of the twenty three that passed though I did not obtain matric exemption (Bachelor pass today). Some of my peers decided to repeat the grade which I also wanted to do. However, my mother refused even after I explained that my marks did not qualify me for university entrance. She asked that *uzoya ngani e* university *ngoba asinayo imali layikhaya* (how are you going to afford university because we do not have money in this household). Consequently, I had to start looking for temporary jobs in Durban; a well-developed city. During that period I did a six months course on Bookkeeping in Durban which came in handy later on. The money I earned from my different jobs before I started college was used to supplement my mother's income and support my siblings. Today we laugh about the reality that to my brother it never recorded that I was no longer working, I was studying. When I was doing first year at Ndumiso College of Education my brother, who was doing standard nine (grade 11) came to me to ask for money and showed me a list of items he needed. I had to explain to him that I was also unemployed. He could have been confused by the fact that when political violence broke out around the township school when he was, I arranged for him to go to a school at KwaSwayimane because we have relatives there. By so doing, he thought I was still playing a father figure role to him.

5.3.4 A seed is planted

In 1985 I got a temporary teaching post at a primary school around Inanda in Durban which was a breakthrough in triggering my love for teaching. I was a privately paid teacher; meaning that I was paid by the school, not the state. I earned R120 per month. Later, it was converted to state-paid post earning R270 per month. The principal said he hired me because I had knowledge of Accounting. I also helped the principal with the financial records of the school. It was then when I realised I wanted to be a teacher. I could not go to university but I could study to become a teacher because the teacher training colleges were not that strict at the time regarding matric exemption as an entrance requirement. In 1986 I took up employment by the Bureau of Language and Literacy (BLL) which was a non-governmental organisation (NGO), because of the better salary. My task was to teach English to illiterate workers. I started saving money for teacher's college. The nuns who worked at the same NGO promised to find bursaries from churches for me to fund my teacher education studies.

5.3.5 The seed germinated

I applied to a number of colleges of education. I accepted the Indumiso College of Education offer. I was well aware that the money I had saved would not last me for three years at college. At best it could only last me for one year but I was very determined to study. I started at college in 1987. During the first quarter I received a bursary from Anglican Church that paid college fees until I finished in 1989. I was offered a job to teach street children by an NGO at Claremont in Durban. I taught for six months. I then got an offer from the Department of Education in June 1990. My career as a teacher started in July 1990 at one of the primary schools at Ndwedwe. At this point, I had to start from scratch building my home and furnishing it as it was in bad shape.

After being appointed I continued to further my studies, thus obtaining Higher Diploma in Education (HDE) in 1993, Bachelor of Arts (BA) in 1999 and BA Honours in Education Management. Thereafter, I registered for Masters in Applied Linguistics but I dropped out because of marital challenges. I applied for Masters at Universities of Pretoria and KwaZulu-Natal but they declined since I did not meet the 60-65% aggregate. I will find a way, I still want to do Masters. In fact I want to reach Doctor of Philosophy level. I believe it is never too late. In the meantime, there is a course I want to do in financial management or Certificate in Accounting because some schools approach me requesting assistance regarding management of school finances.

5.3.6 A setback streak

I wanted to start a family and settle down. I bought a house at Ntuzuma Township around Durban in 1994. This is also one of the townships that were formerly designated exclusively for Africans as a result of the apartheid policies. I got married in 1999 but it did not work. Around 2004 we parted ways through divorce. We fought a lot even up to this date. After that I met a woman whom I had a good relationship with. I paid *ilobolo* (very loosely translated as bride price) for her and we were together for eight years. Sadly, she passed on in 2015. To this date, I am still asking myself if I could have done anything to save my woman's life. She was a blessing. She became a mother to all four children from my previous marriage.

5.3.7 Assuming the ultimate at school level

Mid-1997 I became a Head of Department at Dedicated Primary School located in deep rural Ndwedwe. Applying for principalship never crossed my mind. Two Circuit Managers

recommended and influenced me to apply because they said I was good at my work. I was persuaded. I applied. I was appointed as the school principal at one of the primary schools in Ndwedwe in 2001. It has not been easy. When I started the school was falling apart. Fencing was collapsing, there was no office and the classrooms were door less. There was no electricity and running water. Worse, commitment was lacking amongst some teachers. The school was divided into two hostile camps. The acting principal had her favourites who enjoyed some privileges which the other camp did not enjoy. The favourites were allowed to attend workshops while the other camp was not. Acting principal's camp did not have to explain anything or submit leave forms if they were absent. The opposing camp had to explain their absence and submit leave forms. There was a lot of conflicts. Consequently, there was not much of a culture of teaching and learning left. When I started, each group wanted me to join their camp which I shunned.

5.3.8 Taking a stand and leading from the front

As a leader at Dedicated Primary School, I lead by example. Leading by example has assisted me in terms of discipline and punctuality of the teachers even though most of them travel by public transport. Since this is a rural area there is a challenge of transport thus teachers would create excuses to come late and would want to leave early like it happens in some schools in the area. I remain at school between 7h30 and 14h30. I highlight this because some principals in the area are either not at school for the duration of the prescribed school hours or their schools knock off early citing transport issues. I attend morning assembly and almost every Monday I open the week with moral lessons. Currently, we are developing themes to focus on. I am always at school. If for some reason I am not at school I report to the HODs or some teachers because I cannot just disappear, it must be known where I am and what I am doing. If I have been on leave, on my return I submit a leave form and capture it on the leave register like I do with everyone else. As disciplined teachers, they miss school if they are sick or there is a serious personal matter to attend to. Such approach helped to stabilise the school.

One day I went to a meeting which finished early. I went back to school. Arriving at school at 13h30, some teachers were about to leave. I told the teachers that honouring their periods has nothing to do with pleasing the school principal but it was about the betterment of learners' livelihoods and African people in general. At one point I went to a principals' meeting which was cancelled. Entering the gate at 9h30, there was hullaballoo in the classrooms. Someone shouted, *"Nangu 'thishomkhulu ... ijubane ijubane."* (There comes the principal! … teachers

ran to their respective classrooms). I called a special meeting at 10h30. I asked each teacher to state in writing why there was chaos when I arrived and how each teacher contributed to such chaos. Being firm helped because such behaviour gradually decreased and teachers are now generally dedicated. As captured in the following dialogue, I can still remember so vividly what transpired at that briefing:

Mr Communist: Arriving at school at 9h30, there was commotion all over the school. I have called this briefing to get your side of the story regarding why there was hullabaloo and how each of you contributed to that chaos.

Teacher 1 : I do not know anything about chaos, I was in my class.

Teacher 2 : Sir, I was on my way to class when you arrived.

Teacher 3 : Mr Principal, it was just few learners who were out to drink water.

Mr Communist: Colleagues, I know exactly what I saw, it doesn't need interpretation. Before this meeting becomes a "he said, she said", each of you should state in writing why the school was chaotic and how you, as an individual, contributed to or prevented that chaos.

Teacher 4 : *Kodwa Thishomkhulu* (But Mr Principal), this is unfair. I was not part of that Chaos and neither did I contribute to it.

Mr Communist: I want those reports on my table on or before 11h30 today. Meeting adjourned.

This is one of the best schools in this area which is regarded as a trendsetter. Furthermore, being a teacher first myself, at the peal of the bell I head straight to class to honour my periods. When I started at this school, some teachers dragged their feet after break. I never reprimanded them, I just became an exemplary figure by going to class on time. I believe it worked because those teachers stopped. If I do not have a class, I perform my administrative duties since I do not have an administrator. When it is quarterly assessments, I submit my work to the HOD for moderation. We do pre-moderation and post-moderation. If the HOD finds some faults, I correct those and resubmit. To maintain a harmonious relationship with the teachers and the

community, I apply the principle of transparency especially on matters related to school funds. I involve them in the budgeting processes and appraise them regularly on the state of school finances in general and how the budget is being operationalised.

5.3.9 Quality assurance through instruments

At Dedicated Primary School we use a monitoring plan to monitor the curriculum delivery. This plan comprises three instruments: submission of lesson plans once a week, announced class visits and quarterly monitoring. Class visits are announced because we do not want to clash with the union. Class visits are monitored by HODs and thereafter they report to me regarding issues like annual teaching plan, teacher file, marking of learners' work and remedial work. After the oral interview with the HOD, I take a copy of the HOD's report. If there are serious challenges regarding teacher's work I call that teacher to account. Then, in quarterly monitoring after every quarter, we check if the teacher completed all the prescribed tasks and if such tasks were moderated by the HOD, curriculum coverage and the recovery plan if necessary. If there is a task that was not done, a teacher needs to state when it will be done and how that will affect the learners' progress. We also have a moderation tool which stipulates what is expected of each question paper. To standardise assessment, HODs conduct pre-moderation and post-moderation after which they report to me. For all the above systems to run smoothly, collectively we draw up a school year plan the previous year in November so that everyone knows what to expect on day-to-day basis.

5.3.10 Capacitating and decisively shielding the vulnerable

The SGB of Dedicated Primary School is supportive as they are able to mobilise the support of the parent body on our behalf. SGB members are not well-educated. After being workshopped by the Department, I also workshop them continuously so they are able to fulfil their mandates. Clarifying circulars which are written in English, I translate them into IsiZulu. When I came, some SGB members wanted to use the school to enrich themselves. I confronted the challenge by making it clear to them that being an SGB member is a national duty though it took some time for them to understand. At one stage we had a radical African National Congress (ANC) youth elected on the SGB. These new youth leaders were a headache but they were not conversant with the provisions of the South African Schools Act (SASA). Being also a teacher union leader and conversant with the Act I stuck to the legal prescripts until they got fed up and they did not finish their term. At one point, during their tenure, there was a cleaner post at the school which was fiercely argued or contested regarding who was to be employed

in that position. These radical youth members wanted their comrade to be employed in that post. I wanted a lady who helped in the school kitchen whose husband was a "child maintenance delinquent." This lady has been loyal to the school for quite some time. Ultimately, this lady was appointed.

5.3.11 Making strides in contextually-responsive innovations

At Dedicated Primary School we also have co-curricular activities like our English Speech contest involving debates, dialogues, spelling and reading, poetry, amongst others. With these, we compete at school, circuit and district levels. Our library comes in handy since our learners use it to prepare for, *inter alia*, their English programmes. This year we started with *Nalibali* programme which teaches learners storytelling, speaking and reading English. On Monday and Wednesday it is compulsory for learners to speak English throughout the day, inside and outside the classroom. This practice is gradually being phased in. These activities help learners to practise speaking English and develop their language proficiency. We compete within our own cluster. Besides these, we also write common English and Maths cluster papers. This decision was based on the observation that nationally learners perform poorly in Maths. I believe that African learners fail to perform maximally due to lack of good command of English. We then analyse results collectively as a cluster to identify our strengths and areas of development which informs our strategy and methodologies going forward.

5.3.12 Rebutting victimhood mentality

My artefacts (scarf and bedspread) remind me that I come from a poor rural family. I lead a rural primary school with children from poor family backgrounds. Given my rural background, I understand their plight. I always encourage teachers that we go all out to find sponsors who can provide for indigent learners. Consequently, we have asked for uniform donations from *Inkosi* (chief) of this area, the municipality and Aqua Amanzi Company, amongst others. The latter granted us R10 000. We bought shoes for learners who did not have shoes. To this date we still have pairs of shoes left that are waiting for any learner who needs shoes. We also use donations to buy school jerseys to give needy learners. Furthermore, we subsidise transport costs for learners' educational excursions. When learners go out to play sports on behalf of the school, we pay for everything. We have set aside a budget for such activities. Further, the scarf and the bedspread also remind me that I constantly share my background with grade 7 with the intention of motivating them to pursue their dreams irrespective of their poor backgrounds.

5.3.13 Investing in capacitating the teachers

I make it my mission to develop Dedicated Primary School teachers where necessary and to keep them abreast with latest developments in the educational arena. Using Integrated Quality Management System (IQMS), a departmental performance management system, we identify areas of development for teachers and identify ways in which they can be supported and developed. For instance, as Staff Development Team (SDT) under my stewardship, realising that the change in systems demanded computer literacy, we organised a local guy to workshop teachers on basic computer skills. We also asked a colleague from the area to workshop our foundation phase teachers on assessment. I have workshopped teachers on labour issues, grievance procedures, budgeting processes, leave measures, Employment of Educators Act (EEA) and the South African Schools Act (SASA).

All teachers are afforded equal opportunities to attend workshops as per their duty load. I also introduced transport subsidy for teachers who attend workshops. After the workshop, they are reimbursed money spent for transport. A prerequisite for refund is proof of attendance and that on their return from the workshops they need to cascade the information to their colleagues.

5.3.14 Beyond the bounds of the call of duty

At one stage the kidnapping of children was perceived to be rife in communities particularly people living with albinism. The threat also existed in the Umkhomazi community where the school is located. It was alleged that that they were kidnapped by *izinyanga* (traditional doctors) to use their body parts to make *umuthi* (traditional medicine). There is a learner in my school who lives with this condition. As a school we feared for the life of that learner. We arranged with the grade R practitioner to take this learner in the morning while in the afternoon I dropped the learner at the bus stop next to her home. I did that for quite some time until the threat subsided. Despite all this, the learner is carefree, brilliant and not easily intimidated; oblivious to day-to-day realities. The learner would laugh at the narratives about the kidnapping of albinos.

5.4 Ms Passionate's narrative: The founder-leader

Ms Passionate's collage and artefact are represented below. Her storied narrative draws on both the collage and the artefact. She is the founder-leader because she started a school out of nothing, there was literally no physical infrastructure but only a school site. Laying the first

"brick" towards building the school was only made possible by her passion synergised with her blood, sweat and tears.

From the moment she opens her mouth, from the first to the last word she speaks, she oozes deep passion for teaching and learning and love for children hence the name "Ms Passionate."

5.4.1 Born and bred in the countryside

I was born in 1959 at eNgonweni, a deep rural area at Ndwedwe. This is one of the areas that were exclusively demarcated for Africans during the apartheid regime. I have three siblings who are all boys and I am the last born who is the only girl in the household. My father had eighty (80) wives. My mother was the fourth wife. My mother did not stay that long in this polygamous marriage with my father. She went back home to my uncles, her brothers. They gave her a site to build her house. My mother worked as a domestic worker and we saw her once in a while because of the apartheid laws. We were raised, in the main, by my maternal grandmother. My uncles were very traditional and they were not religious. They believed education was useless, especially for girls. They called people who were educated names. My uncles were well-known for *ingoma and isicathamiya* (traditional music genres). I was good at *ingoma and isicathamiya* which I learnt from my uncles. My uncles persuaded my mother to allow me to join *ingoma* full-time. My mother blatantly refused. She told them she wanted me to become an educated woman. My mother was very strong, I believe I took after her. I started primary school education at eMfume, a rural area on the southern coast of KwaZulu-Natal Province though I was underage (under six years). I loved reading and I was very good at English. After completing my primary school education I started secondary school education at one of the rural schools at Umzinyathi, near Ndwedwe. Coming from a poor family and with my mother being a domestic worker, she could not afford to buy me new school uniform. She bought me used school uniform. Other learners would laugh at me when they recognised that the uniform belonged to some learner they knew which drove me to tears.

Figure 5. 6: Ms Passionate's collage

5.4.2 College dream and unwanted pregnancy

While doing form 3 (today grade 10) I told my mother that on the following year I wanted to go to Madadeni College of Education to train as a teacher. This college, now defunct, was designated for Africans during apartheid regime. At that time one could train as a teacher after completing grade 10. I did not know though where I would get the money for college. My mother put her foot down, she wanted me to finish grade 12. I then enrolled at a secondary school at KwaMashu for grade 11. KwaMashu then, was a township exclusively reserved for Africans as per apartheid policies. Before that, in 1977 I fell in love with a boy we have been friends with since 1974. We met at Ndwedwe. This boy later became my husband. I fell pregnant by this boy but I passed grade 11. I gave birth in 1978. Generally, in the area, girls who had babies while still at school did not go back to school. Though my uncles discouraged my mother from sending me back to school, my mother insisted that I went back to school. I completed grade 12. Since there was no money to pay for my tertiary education, I took up a post as a privately paid teacher (paid by the school) at one secondary school at Ndwedwe. At the end of the same year 1980, I fell pregnant again by the same boy. My mother was very upfront. She summoned this boy to our home. She told him to decide if he wanted to marry me because he kept on distracting me with pregnancies. The boy told my mother that he wanted to marry me. My mother made it very clear that after getting married he needed to ensure that I went to college to finish my studies. I got married in 1981. This brings to the fore the conversation I had with my mother:

Ms Passionate: Mama, ngikhulelwe (Mother, I am pregnant).

Mother : *Zala ingane yakho ubuyele eskoleni* (Give birth to your baby and go back to school). You must complete your matric.

Ms Passionate: Mama, I cannot go back to school in this area because they say *umfazi* (girl who has given birth out of wedlock) cannot go back to school.

Mother : Passionate, you are going back to school. I am going to talk to this boy's family to tell them to take their baby and you will go back to school.

Ms Passionate: Mama, I will definitely go back to school but please allow me to go to another school in another area.

After I fell pregnant with my second born by the same boy, this is the dialogue my mother had with my then boyfriend, now my husband:

Mother: You see my boy, I was trying to do everything I can to take my daughter to where I want her to be in terms of education but you keep on distracting her. Now, it is the high time that you decided, if you want to marry her, marry her; if you do not want to marry her, tell me or leave her alone.

Boy : Mama, ngiyaxolisa (I am sorry), I am going to marry her. She is the mother of my children.

Mother: *Kulungile mfana wami* (It's ok my boy), if you marry her, take her back to school. I have tried but you kept on letting me down. Make sure you marry her in 1981 and in 1982 ensure that she goes to college.

Boy : *Ngiyezwa mama* (I understand mother), I will do exactly that. I won't disappoint you.

5.4.3 Qualified and hand-picked for leadership

In 1982 I registered at a college of education to train as a teacher. I completed my three year Primary Teachers' Diploma. I started working as a qualified teacher in a rural primary school at Ndwedwe in 1985. Other than prescribed subjects, I also taught learners *ingoma* and *isicathamiya*. While working at this school, I observed that the area did not have early childhood development centres, particularly crèches and pre-schools. I applied for sponsorship to build a crèche. Another one was jointly built by my brother and my brother-in-law. In the midst of all of that the principal announced that she had decided to make me her vice principal. A post which was not officially recognised and did not have any monetary incentives. Today, this post is commonly known as deputy principalship. I am not sure though what it was that the principal saw in me.

5.4.4 Catapulted to the apex: Founder-leader of a school

One *induna* (headman) in the area was not happy about the fact that there was no school in his area. His unhappiness prompted him to approach the principal of the school where I was. This induna told my principal that he wanted to start a school in his area. He wanted advice which my principal provided. In 1997 a circuit manager from Ndwedwe Circuit came to the school to

announce that the Department has granted my principal and *induna* permission to start a school. The circuit manager asked my principal to release one of her teachers to head the new school. She selected me to become the acting principal of the new school.

I started as an acting principal in a new school on 21 January 1997. The "new school" was just an open veld, there was not even a single structure. The community just donated a site. The Area Development Committee of which I was the secretary allowed me to use the crèche as the temporary school since there was no structure at the new school site. My first grade 1 class started there. It was a one-teacher school as per Post Provisioning Norm (PPN) provisions. PPN is a model used by the Department to allocate teacher posts to public schools based on the number of learners enrolled in a school. I had to contend with some challenges. I had to be at school every day, I could not go to principals' meetings. I remember one day *Umhloli* (Circuit Manager) came and shouted at me for not attending the principals' meetings. I literally cried and asked what he wanted me to do under the circumstances. During 1997, the Department sent a lady teacher to my school. I also negotiated with my Circuit Manager to ask the principal of my previous school to send surplus teachers to me. Then another teacher joined us.

In 1997 there was a mass exodus of learners from rural schools to ex-Model C and former Indian schools at Verulam. Verulam then, was exclusively reserved for Indians by the apartheid legislation. For people to notice that there was a new school in the area, I resolved to teach differently. Though the policy stipulated that foundation phase should be taught in IsiZulu, my argument was that in the Indian schools they were migrating to, they would be taught in English. I then began to teach my grade 1 English. Even in my previous school I taught my learners in English. Parents noticed and they were happy. The grass mat on which my artefact, *ukhamba* (clay pot) rests is the foundation. This reminds me that it should be "first things first"; I have to start by building the foundation and grow from there. *Isigovuzo/isikhetho* (traditional utensil used to eliminate unwanted objects from and stir a beverage contained in *ukhamba*) on top of *ukhamba* reminds me that for growth to happen I need to use *isigovuzo/isikhetho* (development) to "keep on stirring" which means to keep on leading effectively and leading by example.

Figure 5. 7: Ms Passionate's artefact

5.4.5 Operationalising my vision

I am a visionary school principal. The ladder on my collage reminds me of my vision every day. It reminds me of the steps I have climbed thus far and those that I still have to climb until I reach the last step in terms realising my vision for the school. Climbing this ladder is not my sole preserve, I take all stakeholders with me in our quest to deliver quality public education. We are a family here. This year one Departmental official commented that what he has noticed about the school is that we are working but everyone is happy. Teachers remain behind after school to do their work until around 17h00. You will find them working and singing. The vision and mission statement of the school were drawn up by parents, teachers and learners. The school community lives it. Learners recite the school motto and the mission statement in the morning assembly. In every class, there is a school vision and mission statement and teachers need to teach it. Furthermore, I lead by example. I model what I would like teachers to do. I am the first one to arrive at school around 6h15. I preach punctuality, cleanliness, respect, cooperation, responsibility and accountability. I do not just tell teachers to prepare a file, I show them how it should be done. As a subject teacher, I submit my file to my HOD. If the HOD invites me to a departmental meeting, I take off the cap of a school principal and I just become an ordinary teacher. In my interaction with the teachers I remain professional and humble at all times, I do not change faces. However, I am very firm. For example, if a teacher has been absent, I start by establishing what the problem was before issuing a leave form. If a teacher is not in class during their period, I do not send a child to call the teacher but I go to the teacher myself to check what could be the problem.

5.4.6 Monitoring and maximising contact time

Together with the teachers, we compile a year plan and they know what to submit and when to submit it. I ensure that they know the month during which unannounced class visits will be done though they do not know the actual dates. I have not experienced any form of resistance neither do I have a problem of chronic teacher late coming.

I supervise cleaning before morning assembly though teachers are in charge. I ensure that teachers deliver moral lessons in the morning assembly every day. After assembly, I move around to check if teaching and learning has started.

I use a monitoring tool to monitor teachers' and learners' work. Teachers submit their assessments in January in order to stay prepared in the event of any eventuality. I check

learners' exercise books. I check if they are marked, corrections are done and also check for the curriculum coverage. I write a report of what I have observed in the exercise books in general and regarding individual learners in particular. For example, since I teach grade four, when I check grade five exercise books and notice that the learners' handwriting has changed; I check with the teacher what could have been the cause of that. I then give these reports to each teacher per term. I encourage teachers to conduct and mark informal tests which feeds into their formal assessments. Other than that, we do not teach these learners alone. We involve their parents, the vital stakeholders. We arrange parent-teacher consultations where parents engage with the work of their children and the teachers. This has enhanced the performance of our learners. Furthermore, we make the most of contact time at our disposal. We prioritise our core business, teaching and learning, irrespective of any other school activities. Teachers should not miss even a single period. We do sports after school. Though the first period officially starts at 8h00, I start teaching grade four at 6h30 before other teachers could overtake me because they also start teaching before 8h00. During this time, in the main, teachers concentrate on effecting parts of the subject improvement plan. In addition, in a bid to maximise contact time, we hold our staff meetings at 6h30 in the morning. It is feasible because some teachers who commuted have decided to rent accommodation in this area.

Furthermore, learners come to school a day before learners open officially for orientation. They are shown their classrooms, they are introduced to their teachers and they receive stationery. I constantly interact with learners. I know all of them by names particularly grades four to seven. Knowing them by names tells them that they are loved and important. I believe you cannot teach learners effectively if you do not love them.

5.4.7 Fulfilling the school mandate and making the difference

Though our infrastructural capacity and resources are inadequate, we budget in order to make the most of what we have. Sometimes I take from my own pocket to pay for day-to-day operational costs due to delays in the transfer of funds. In the face of this, I prioritise domestic accounts, learner-teacher support material and maintenance. We use our norms and standards, though not enough, to prioritise textbook procurement. I believe that this minimises the number of underperforming learners. During our meetings for strategic planning before the academic school year ends, we set performance targets for the forthcoming year. We set the general target for the entire school and thereafter for each grade and class and every teacher sets their own targets.

Some of our neighbouring secondary schools produce poor results. There was an outcry that learners do not understand English, the language of teaching and learning. In a bid to assist the secondary schools, I started the English Speech Programme. It involves activities like storytelling, debates, spelling, and speech contest, amongst others. Learners compete here at school, cluster, circuit and district levels. We have collected a number of trophies, from such programme competitions, that you see in this office. Further, I follow up on my ex-grade 7 learners to check with their secondary school teachers how they perform and what we need to work on as a primary school to make their job easier. My artefact, *ukhamba* (clay pot), reminds me that we have to protect, teach and develop these learners so that one day they are able to give back to their communities. Ukhamba represents the school, *amahewu* that my grandmother used to put into ukhamba represents learners. *Amahewu* is a traditional non-alcoholic beverage made of maize meal. When this "amahewu" is ready, it will quench the thirst (change socioeconomic status) of the homes and communities where these learners come from.

Lastly, given the poverty-stricken backgrounds of some learners, I allow them to dish up a meal they will take home from the school nutrition programme.

5.4.8 Passionately driving professional development

I provide professional development to my teachers but I also encourage them to develop themselves. I encourage teachers to further their studies so that they remain well-equipped to execute their core responsibilities. I have induction and mentorship programmes. The design of the mentorship programme is driven by Integrated Quality Management System (IQMS). IQMS is a teacher performance management policy of the Department. At the beginning of the year, I organise induction workshops for both new and old teachers. For the former, it is orientation on school culture, classroom management and policy issues. For the latter, it is refresher session to keep them focused. I also develop them on legible handwriting on the chalkboard. In turn, teachers would teach learners this legible handwriting. I even go to class to check teachers' handwriting on the chalkboard. I breathe professional development even into general staff meetings. I am like ukhamba, my artefact, which contains "amahewu"; information that I keep on cascading to stakeholders. My mother brewed fresh *mahewu* every day. This reminds me that I should not stop learning, I need to keep abreast of the latest developments in order to provide teachers and learners with something new every day for the benefit of the school. In 2008 the Department offered me a bursary to do Advanced Certificate

in Education (ACE) specialising in school leadership and management. A qualification which has helped me a lot in effectively executing my responsibilities. I afford teachers the opportunity to attend in-service training organised by the Department. In some workshops like *Jika Imfundo* workshops, I attend with them so that I get it from the horse's mouth. By so doing, teachers would understand that I know exactly what is expected of them and the actualities they may face in the classroom.

5.5 Ms Elegant's narrative: Deeply in love with her school

Ms Elegant's collage and artefact are represented below. Her storied narrative draws on both the collage and the artefact. Ms Elegant proudly announces that she loves her school because it reflects who she is and her love for an organised work environment. The parent community and the community at large love her. She says that though she comes from urban surroundings, she decided to give/bring "urban feel or experience" to her rural school so that everyone enjoys coming to school. She tries by all means possible to go an extra mile in a bid to make it work for everyone.

From entering the gate, one is not "greeted" by papers or debris flying all over the place, there are no broken window panes or doors or leaking water tank taps, to meeting the lady in charge and seeing the pictures of the school before she arrived and after; it is a reflection of aura of elegance in her, hence the name "Ms Elegance."

5.5.1 Hailing from *ekasi* (township)

I was born in 1968 at KwaMashu, a township which was by apartheid laws, reserved for Africans. My father passed on while I was only two months old. My six siblings and I were raised by my mother single-handedly. We lived in a one room house and later moved to a two room house. My mother worked as a domestic worker. She never went to school. She also sold *isiqatha* (one of the illicit alcoholic beverage brewed, in the main, by African communities) in order to supplement her income. My mother

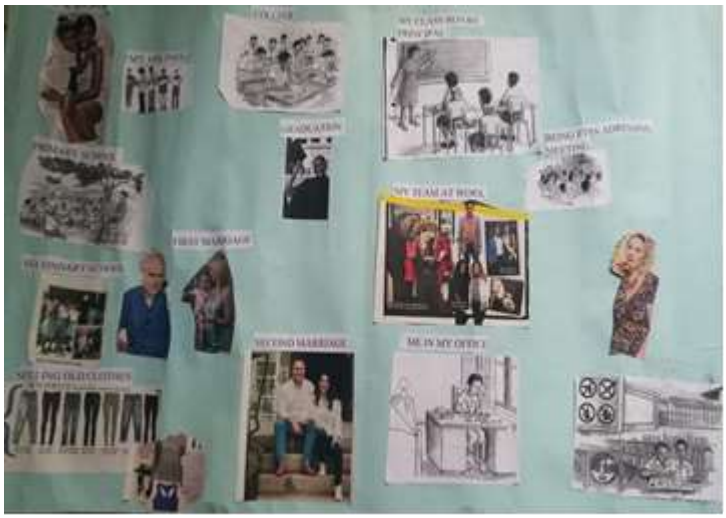

Figure 5. 8: Ms Elegant's collage

sold this *isiqatha* at Point Road, downtown Durban. Sometimes we would go with her early in the morning and come back at 7h30 in time for school. I was very close to my mother. She continued working until she got diabetes and heart condition but she did not stop selling *isiqatha*. My siblings did not go that far at school. I was the only one who went as far as tertiary education. Consequently, my artefact which is a candleholder with a built-in candle reminds me that I uplifted the status of my family. I am the light in my family. Even extended family members consult me with their problems because they trust the leader (light) that I am.

I did my primary school education at two primary schools at KwaMashu. Due to lack of infrastructure, in one of the primary schools, we were taught under the trees. I also did my secondary school education at KwaMashu. When my other siblings started secondary school, my mother found it very difficult to make ends meet. I did not have school shoes and my uniform was torn. I remember one of the teachers bought me school uniform at primary school excluding shoes. I went to school barefooted up until I started secondary school. A music teacher identified music talent in me. This teacher bought me full school uniform as I was still using uniform for my previous school. In the afternoons, while I was doing grades 11 and 12, with the help of my neighbour, I started to sell used clothes in town. With my neighbour, we would move from flat to flat looking for old clothes. It was sort of an exchange because we would give people baskets of fruit and vegetables in exchange for old clothes. It was too risky and in some cases, we had some horrible receptions but we did not have a choice.

5.5.2 Vulnerable and getting married at tender age

Coming from a poor background, young, beautiful and vulnerable, people would take advantage of you. When I was doing standard 9 (grade 11 today), I met this guy and I fell pregnant. After giving birth, I went back to school to finish my grade 12. He paid *ilobolo* (loosely translated as bride price) while I was only 16 years of age. We got married while I was doing grade 12 at the tender age of 18 in 1995. I told my husband I wanted to go to tertiary because I was determined to become the best I could be. The man was reluctant.

5.5.3 College years and my survival

I borrowed money from someone. I went to Mpumalanga College of Education in 1996 to do Primary Teachers' Diploma (PTD). This college, now defunct, was in this province, KwaZulu-Natal. It was exclusively designated for Africans by the apartheid government. I did not apply for admission therefore I had to bribe some official to get admitted. My first year was extremely

difficult. My husband was trying by all means to destroy me but I soldiered on. I was only 19 years at that time. I still sold second hand clothes up until I met a lady from my *kasi* who introduced me to selling clothes from overseas. I used the profit I made from selling second hand clothes to give to his lady so that she could buy stock for me. It was only then that I started to afford to support myself and my siblings' children. I completed my diploma in 1998. I could not get a post. I still continued with selling clothes from overseas.

5.5.4 Inevitable multiple losses

My mother passed on while I was doing my first year at college. It was a very painful experience considering that we were very close. My siblings had children who stayed with my mother. After the death of my mother I had to stay with these children because my siblings were scattered all over. Subsequently, my siblings started dying one by one. I am the only one left at home. Further, after being permanently employed in 2003, I bought my first car which lasted only six months. My husband crashed it out of inferiority complex issues. He was aggressive and abusive. In 2006 he shot me but I survived. In 2007 he chased me out of the matrimonial house. We got divorced in 2008. I went back home, KwaMashu. I had to start afresh renovating the house because it was dilapidated since nobody lived there.

5.5.5 Beginning a noble career and swelling union ranks

In 2001 I started working as a volunteer teacher at one of the primary schools around Inanda (an area designated for Africans by the apartheid government). In 2003 I became permanently employed at the school where I was volunteering. I was working as a teacher and doing business aside. In 2012 I bought a small house at an affluent suburb around Durban. In 2010 I met this guy and we got married in 2015. I sold my first house and I bought another one at an upmarket suburb outside Durban.

I am a South African Democratic Teachers' Union (SADTU) member. I was a SADTU Site Steward at my school. I was the most vocal about issues that affected teachers hence my election to this position. In 2009 I was elected into SADTU Sports, Arts and Culture portfolio at regional level. In 2011 I was seconded to the SADTU Regional Office as a Full Time Shop Steward (FTSS). I held both positions. You know how politics work, in 2014 when our term expired, we were dissolved. In politics, they want you to toe the line and be a "yes boss." If they see that you are strong and you are not afraid to speak your mind, you become a victim. I was that kind of a union leader. I believe that challenges that people throw your way make you

stronger. After five years in that secondment, I had to go back to my school. This effectively meant coming from occupying a relatively high office in the union, I had to assume duty as post level one again. However, I could not go back because we were not in good terms with the principal. I always stood up to her when I felt she was crossing the line like instructing teachers to clean the toilets. I decided to take incapacity leave in 2014. At one point I did not get paid because I had exhausted my leave but still, I stood my ground I did not go back.

5.5.6 Making it to the top and its micro-politics

After leaving from the regional structure, already there was a bulletin for school-based promotion posts that had been published. I applied to different schools. I did not receive any calls for interviews. I am not sure what happened with the one I am currently occupying. Apparently, there was infighting in the SGB so they decided to ask the District Office to take over the processes. While on six months sick leave, I received a call from the District Office inviting me to an interview for my incumbent post. While being the FTSS, I accumulated wealth of knowledge regarding interviews. The knowledge I gained helped to ace the interview.

I assumed duty as school principal at Glamour Primary School in mid-2014. It was not easy. There was a Deputy Principal (DP) who had been acting as a principal since the death of previous principal in 2013. There was bitterness because the DP did not get the post. Arriving here, there were two hostile camps; the former principal's camp and the deputy principal's camp. *Umhloli* (Circuit Manager) briefed me about the micro-politics at the school. He told me that my first responsibility was to bring stability to the school. On my first day I was accompanied by *Abahloli* (Circuit Managers) because they knew it was going to be difficult for some people to accept the new principal. Some were happy with the arrival of the new principal and some were still aggrieved that the DP was not appointed as the school principal. Fortunately, the balance of forces favoured me. I announced that I was willing to work with everyone irrespective of the differences that may exist and I was willing to resolve such differences. On the second day, I kick-started the change process. I changed my office set up so that you enter into the reception office first before you can get through to my office. Before, it was vice versa.

5.5.7 Parents vote with their children

When I came to this school the enrolment was 611 but today it is 931. The enrolment has increased because of the quality of teaching and learning at this school. When it comes to

school choice, parents vote with their children. Whether I am at school or not, the school still runs smoothly. I told everyone to subscribe to their professional conscience and I constantly remind them that the departmental policies are able to deal with non-compliance. From 2014 the community observed that there were positive changes at the school. Learners who had left the school came back and new learners flooded in.

We teach our grade R to 3 in English despite the policy provision of the Department that they need to be taught in IsiZulu. I took this decision together with the SMT, SGB and the parents. When I started at Glamour Primary School, generally, even grades 4 to 7 were taught in IsiZulu. I emphasised that the language of teaching and learning should be English. It was not smooth sailing because I had to fight with the Foundation Phase Subject Advisors who told us to use IsiZulu. Contrary to policy position, as a foot soldier I could see that learners were coping fairly well with English. Parents want their children to speak and understand English and they commend us for teaching their children in English. Such commendation triggers the thought that I am the candlelight that leads the teaching and learning terrain and the school community follows. It is my conviction that if the candlelight (leader) is ineffective, teaching and learning cannot be effective. Following, is the poem that parents recite silently in awe of the progress thus far:

The ultimate star

Twinkle, twinkle poor star

How I wonder where you came from

Up above the school so dark

Lighting up path of our gloomed future

Regenerating work ethics

Redefining effectiveness

Dazzling beacon of hope inviting the fled

Indeed, you are our ultimate star

I believe we are doing the best we can under the circumstances to provide quality public education. Though being a deep rural primary school, we can compete with former Indian schools. Some neighbouring secondary schools which are perceived to be successful do not

just admit anyone. Contrary to standing policy, our learners do not have to apply, they just ask me to submit the list of prospective learners because they know the quality of our product. One neighbouring primary school in another area is left with approximately sixty learners as their learners are flocking to this school. I believe it is not my own doing, it is God's grace though.

5.5.8 Alleviating the plight of our vulnerable learners

I do have learners who travel long distances to this school using scholar transport. However, when I started our learners did not have access to scholar transport because of competition for enrolment amongst neighbouring schools. I had to fight with the Department and based on policy, argued that scholar transport is not for the exclusive use of one school, it is for all learners in the area. Thereafter, our learners had access to scholar transport up until to date. Subsequently, learners gradually began voting with their feet by enrolling at this school.

We are in a deep rural area. There are children who come from indigent backgrounds and child-headed households as well as those who are orphans left with their grandmothers. We have had sponsors who have been buying uniforms every year for those who could not afford them. Amongst these, I have also partnered with a local taxi association. The association sponsors us with uniforms for those learners who could not afford to buy uniform.

Since I started that programme, all learners wear school uniform. In addition, when I started at this school, the nutrition programme was no longer in place. I had to enquire with the Department and ask them to reinstate it, which they did. We allow some learners to dish extra food from our nutrition programme so that they can take it home. I took it upon my shoulders to persuade our supplier for the nutrition programme to provide us with more food so that needy learners can take some home. The previous supplier organised food parcels that we also distributed to these learners.

5.5.9 Professionalising the institution and close monitoring of core business

I must highlight that the principal of my previous school is my role model though she had some flaws as a human being. Such flaws provided valuable leadership lessons for my current leadership. Though I did not see it then as I was a union leader. I acquired some of my leadership skills and practices from her. I learnt about these monitoring tools from her. She was visible and hands on at school which is what I do. I do rounds after morning assembly and/or after break to ensure that everything is in order regarding cleanliness and if everyone is at their workstation, amongst others. I am not an "office-based" principal and neither am I an

"in and out of school" school principal. I believe that doing the rounds is an integral part of monitoring. I do not have classes to teach this year but last year, I did. This year I have a lot on my plate.

When I started at this school, there was "darkness." The school was dilapidated, the work and professional ethics were deteriorating and the enrolment was dwindling. There was no hope. The candleholder with a built-in candle prompts the memory that I was the much needed light to this "darkness" through my leadership that brought about hope and transformation of the school. In my first staff meeting I had to deal with protocol and professional issues as well as interpersonal relations. Teachers did not sign the time book accordingly and neither did they sign the leave forms if they have been absent. Teachers would come and go as they pleased. I had to put systems in place to curb such behaviour. I preached the gospel of maintaining harmonious relationships irrespective of differences. I remain humble in my dealings with them and I treat all of them with respect. Furthermore, I believe in an open door policy. This means staff members can approach me at any time if they feel their HODs may not be able to address their problems or issues. As the School Management Team (SMT), we keep our interactions with individual teachers confidential. Teachers get through to me through their Heads of Department (HODs). If they have something personal to discuss with me they make an appointment. I maintain a professional relationship with every stakeholder. I do not have friends at school and even my SMT are not my friends. Our interactions remain professional. I am very upfront and principled which helps me to maintain consistency in my leadership of the school.

Figure 5. 9: Ms Elegant's artefact

Teachers meet on Fridays in their different phases, namely: foundation phase, intermediate phase and senior phase. Thereafter, they meet in different grades to discuss their lesson preparation for the following week and other challenges/issues they may have. On Mondays the HODs bring minute books, lesson plans and report those challenges to me. For teaching and learning to be effective, we do close monitoring. On a monthly basis HODs check learners' exercise books to see if they are marked and also check the curriculum coverage. I also do check some learners' exercise books and workbooks together with HODs files. Teachers

submit their assessment tasks as per policy guidelines and question papers to HODs for moderation and in turn, HODs submit to the Deputy Principal (DP). Thereafter, they all report to me. I write reports regarding what I have found. Where necessary, I do follow up on pending issues; either with the HODs, DP or with the individual teachers. With the SMT, I do not give them dates on which I will request their files; I ask for their files at any time. I believe that the SMT should lead by example. After submissions as per the management plan, we also duplicate question papers and keep them safely long before the assessment month so that we are ready for any eventuality.

I use monitoring tools to monitor the work of the SMT. I also designed monitoring tools for the DP and the HODs which are used to monitor the HODs and teachers respectively. These tools are target specific since we all need to know exactly what is to be monitored and how it is to be monitored. Furthermore, we have a curriculum management plan which informs everyone regarding what to submit and when to submit it. Accordingly, we also do random unannounced class visits which are not a fault finding expedition but a constant reminder to teachers that their work is being closely monitored. This emphasises the importance of maximising contact time. We introduced monitoring tools of which I would like to share through the following conversation I had with my HODs:

Ms Elegant: Colleagues, what does your monitoring of teachers' work entail?

HOD 1: Teachers submit files. I check if there is lesson plan for that week. Then I stamp the lesson plan and sign.

HOD 2: I do likewise. When they submit assessments, I stamp, sign it and give it back to them.

Ms Elegant: Colleagues, your way of monitoring is ineffective. For monitoring to be effective, you need to know exactly what you are monitoring and how it should be monitored. To do that you need monitoring tools that are target items specific. Today, I introduce you to the tools for teachers and learners that speak specifically to individual items/issues that should be monitored.

All HODs: Siyabonga (Thank you). Now, we understand what close monitoring involves.

5.5.10 All hands on deck in the spirit of making a difference

Our *Mhloli* suggested we start a cluster for networking purposes. In our cluster, based on our contextual realities, we decided to start an English programme to assist our learners since English is the medium of instruction from primary school to tertiary level. This programme involves activities like poetry, drama, reading and speech amongst others. Though we do not have a library, each class has a library corner with some shelves and books that learners use for reading. Some books were donated by my colleagues from other schools.

After analysing the results per term, I hold one on one meetings with the subject teachers to ascertain what their challenges are and how best we can address them collectively. In addition, we have remedial programmes for those learners who fail or those who seem to lag behind from their peers in the same grade. For instance, if a grade 3 learner struggles with phonics in a language, we send that learner to a teacher who is going to provide extra-tuition in that regard. We have periods for remedial work on our timetable.

I am very sensitive about contact time therefore, staff meetings are held after school. I protect contact time at all costs. Cell phones are not allowed in the classroom for both teachers and learners. If teachers have urgent matters to attend to using cell phones, they report to their immediate supervisors. Strategically, we start with a prayer in our morning briefings before learners' assembly and teaching and learning resume for the day. Other than that I believe in prayers, holding morning briefings minimises the need for staff meetings (though they are mainly held after 14h30) as I do not want teaching and learning time to be interrupted. Deliberations in such briefings are minuted.

Teaching and learning start promptly at 8h00. We have three registers: one at the gate, the ordinary time book for those who come and leave on time and lastly, the time register for late arrival and early departure. Teachers know that there are consequences if the sum total of late arrival or early departure hours adds to seven hours. They have to sign a leave of absence form. Some teachers, especially those who rent accommodation around this area, come early to do their work. Additionally, there are two unions at this school; SADTU and National Teachers Union (NATU). If the teachers from one of the unions leave early for a meeting, the others remain will behind to continue with the core business of the school and supervise learners. We do not close the school. Generally, this does not happen with other schools.

Our learners are disciplined and we teach them to take responsibility for their actions. Between January 2017 and now (June), not even a single window pane has been broken by learners unlike in other schools. After eating, which is organised through the nutrition programme, they wash their plates. After break, the teacher who is in charge supervises learners who pick up papers for five minutes.

5.5.11 Soldiering on in defiance of contextual actualities

When I arrived resources were neither here nor there. Teachers had to ask other schools for help regarding photocopying. I turned this situation around by buying the necessary equipment to assist teachers in the execution of their core responsibilities. There was no electricity at this school (even though there was electricity in the area), learners' desks were not enough and literally there was no furniture for grade Rs. Currently, though the resources are inadequate and our enrolment is relatively high, we manage to make best with what we have. Using sponsorships where available and school allocation, we stagger our budget targets. We cannot buy everything for all phases at once except for textbooks and stationery. For all other materials I target a phase or a grade in a given academic year and do the same in the following year. Further, if the school runs out of funds before the next allocation, our finance policy stipulates that the principal may use his/her own funds which will be reimbursed once the school receives its allocation. The principal needs to keep records and invoices. Further, other than academic staff, we have one cleaner and one administrator who are state-paid, our security guards are SGB-paid. We pay them from the school allocation.

Due to insufficient floor space, some classes are overcrowded. On average our teacher-learner ratio ranges between 1:60 and 1:70. I asked the Department for pre-fabricated classrooms. I have since received three. There is some relief though not enough. I am compelled to chase prospective learners away because of infrastructural capacity constraints. Based on PPN provisions, we have enough academic staff however, our reality in the classrooms refutes what our PPN provisions suggest. Our classes are overcrowded which means we need more teachers.

When I came in 2014, ablution facilities were not enough. I asked the Department to assist us and they brought the mobile toilets. I buy toilet paper for learners because they were using all sorts of objects to wipe themselves. Some girls missed school during their menstrual cycle. I solicited sponsorship for sanitary pads up until the Department started to provide it to public schools.

5.5.12 In pursuit of continuing professional development

Generally, teachers at this school like to upgrade their professional qualifications. Some are more qualified than I am. Currently, I am also registered with a private higher education institution. I was granted a scholarship by the Department to study a leadership in management course.

I inform teachers about workshops organised by the Department. Whoever attends a workshop, on their return they workshop all of us so that we are on the same page regarding latest developments in the realm of educational practice. I emphasise to them that one cannot remain in one grade forever. From time to time there will be reshuffling or rotation of duty loads. Therefore, everyone needs to stay ready for such eventuality. The usual venue for the workshops is about 90 kilometres from here. In some cases, on the day of the workshop teachers do not start at school especially if it starts in the morning. We do subsidise teachers for their travelling costs.

Based on our open door policy, teachers are free to come to the SMT with initiatives that seek to enhance the quality of our teaching and learning. We give everyone a chance to pitch their ideas and see how best we can implement them. Moreover, I do network and we allow teachers to network with other schools and teachers for professional growth purposes. Where necessary, I also invite people from outside or external agencies to workshop teachers on a range of relevant professional and/or labour issues.

If I leave early or I am not at school, I alternately appoint HODs to act as school principal since we are still waiting for our deputy principal. Even if I am not at school, whoever is in charge will know where to find files or whatever information is required by a departmental official. When teachers freely declare in staff meetings that they have learnt a great deal from my leadership and they are more than ready to apply for promotion posts, I am reminded that indeed I am the candlelight that lights their way (develop them) and they see me as their light.

5.6 Chapter conclusion

This chapter presented narrative analysis which is the first level of analysis. The chapter presented the re-storied narratives of school principals in response to the first question: *who are the school principals leading primary schools in rural contexts?* Concept mapping was used in the process of emplotment. Plots in each narrative were threaded into a coherent whole which gave rise to research texts. These narratives are characterised by three commonplaces,

namely: temporality, place and sociality. I have learnt that the past, the present and the future are embodied in the school principals' narratives as they interface with a space or a series of spaces in the midst of individual and community narrative capital. To this end, narratives are in constant transitional mode.

Chapter Six presents meanings and understandings that school principals draw on in their leadership practice.

CHAPTER SIX

MEANINGS AND UNDERSTANDINGS SCHOOL PRINCIPALS DRAW ON IN THEIR LEADERSHIP PRACTICE

6.1 Introduction

Chapter Five presented the re-storied narratives of Ms Assertive, Mr Communist, Ms Passionate and Ms Elegant and represented my first level of analysis, namely narrative analysis. These re-storied narratives responded to my first research sub-puzzle, namely: *Who are the school principals leading primary schools in rural contexts?*

The deconstruction of the narratives, namely the analysis of narratives (second level of analysis) is presented in two chapters (this chapter and chapter 7). In this chapter I address the second research sub-puzzle, namely: *What meanings and understandings do the school principals draw on in their leadership of rural primary schools?* Addressing this sub-puzzle, I drew from the Social Identity Theory which posits that social identity prescribes and describes the personal and professional qualities that members should comply with which shape their beliefs, perspectives and behaviour (Hogg, Terry & White, 1995). To this end, leadership practices of school principals need to be understood on the basis of their personal and professional meanings and understandings and what these particularise for their leadership.

The chapter focuses on personal and professional meanings and understandings that school principals draw on in leading rural primary schools. These meanings and understandings are presented individually for each school principal as they are classified into different social categorisations which influence their behaviour. It is through this social categorisation that their roles as school principals are made and defined (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Consequently, individual school principals define themselves on the basis of meanings which are transmitted to them by the structured social categories they fall into (Stryker, 1980). The social groups that each school principal belongs to, impact on the process of construction of unique meanings and understandings. It is on this basis that the teacher identity cannot only be understood in relation to the professional facet of the self; but also with regard to the professional dimension of the self (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009). In this study, the dimensions of personal and professional self of the participants are given due consideration.

This section draws on the more dominant personal and professional meanings and understandings of self of participants. I initially contemplated on separating the personal and

professional meanings and understandings of self. However, after engaging with the identities of self, it dawned on me that the personal meanings and understandings of self informs the professional meanings and understandings of self and vice versa. Manifestly, personal and professional selves of a teacher are inextricably linked; a dimension which must be considered in understanding the identities of teachers (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009).

The meanings and understandings that the participants draw on in their leadership are presented in the same order as the re-storied narratives in Chapter Five which is as follows: Ms Assertive comes first, followed by Mr Communist, thereafter it is Ms Passionate. Concluding the chapter is Ms Elegant.

6.2 Ms Assertive's meanings and understandings of self that she draws on in her leadership practice

This section presents and discusses the following meanings and understandings: a religiously grounded educator, a family-orientated matriarch, a direction-setting organisational figure and a proactive teacher.

6.2.1 A religiously grounded educator

To human beings, uncertainty breeds discomfort and a disinclination mode hence they are generally inclined to get rid of uncertainty or find means to manage it psychologically (Kossowska & Sekerdej, 2015). Adhering to a set of religious beliefs mitigates the impact of life's complexities and uncertainties on people's day-to-day activities (Kossowska & Sekerdej, 2015). These religious beliefs serve as a psychological response to ambiguity. School principals may feel uncertain about the decisions they have taken or have not taken, decisions they will have to take in the future and about what to expect in the face of today's constantly changing educational arena. Ms Assertive is religiously grounded. She subscribes to the religion of Christianity. She highlights how she and the school start each day:

> *"I make sure by 7h15 I'm at school. I start in the clerk's office to sign [the time book] then I go to my office, I pray. Every day in the morning we come together in the assembly. We still pray in our school, we pray every day.*

Thus religion appears to influence her professional self. She starts her day with prayer which attests to her faith in her Supernatural entity. She prays alone in her office before she goes out to join the rest of the school in morning devotions. Ms Assertive also leads morning devotions

which marks the beginning of each day for the whole school. She believes in communicating with her Supernatural Being before she tackles the business of the day. Such a belief may be her means of alleviating the impact of uncertainty and complexity in her line of duty. In her own words, Ms Assertive testified that:

> *We used to have one police [security guard] at night but you know these people, sometimes they think the school has got monies [is very rich]. You give them R1200, they say it's small but then they will quit. So I end up saying, no, let's leave our school like that at night and I said God will see. Last December [2017] bekungekho muntu [there was no security guard], nothing happened.*

Instead of worrying or fussing about the unknown and the uncertain regarding the security of the school, Ms Assertive transcendentally leaves the security threat to God to attend to it. She rests assured in the faith that God is in control.

Religion has a considerable influence on the behaviour of organisational leaders (Modaff, Butler & DeWine, 2012). To this end, the institution of religion is fundamental in people's day to day experiences hence the conclusion that it shapes people's personalities, behaviours and systems of values (Pekerti and Sendjaya, 2010; Hage & Posner, 2015). Religion then becomes the moral "manual" that guides the people in their everyday life encounters. In this regard, Ms Assertive pronounces:

> *I strongly believe in God, that also helps me. I pray a lot. Sometimes we [human beings] want to change things that we cannot change. Umuntu oka Nkulunkulu, mase ngikhulumile naye umuntu [a human being is God's creation, once I have spoken to an individual, it is up to God to change them].*

Ms Assertive acknowledges that at times, people dare to change that which is impossible for them to change. She believes that since God created man (humans), it is then only God who can make it possible for people to change. As a human being she can only do whatever is humanly possible to persuade people to change. This suggests that beyond what is humanly possible, God, as the creator of Man (humans), is capable of doing what is only supernaturally possible to change the people.

Ms Assertive acknowledges the intervention of the will of God in her appointment as the HOD as she did not bring her ID to the interview as per the policy provisions. She did not know she had to produce it to the panel. The panel forgot to ask for her ID but subsequent to her interview

they asked for applicants' IDs. Given her ignorance and the coincidental forgetfulness of the panel, she believes that her appointment was predestined by God. She recollects:

> *I did not even have an ID when I went to the interview. I wasn't aware I have to bring my ID. Fortunate for me, they also forgot to ask for the ID, but for the second participant they remembered, they asked for it. Yeah, it was God's miracle, when it's your time, it's your time.*

Religion, convictions and value systems, *inter alia*, mould how people perceive their world (Kaya, 2015). Religion provides the answers for the humanly unexplained and it drives the urge to find, understand and execute one's purpose in life. Ms Assertive believes that it cannot be explained in human terms how or why, during her turn, the interview panel forgot to invoke the policy provisions regarding identification of applicants but ending up bagging the job.

6.2.2 A family-orientated matriarch

Family refers to a network of people sharing their lives over extended periods, connected by legal, voluntary, blood or marriage relations. This network of people need to think of themselves as a family, share common historical background and anticipate to function as a family currently and in the future (Galvin, Braithwaite & Bylund, 2018). What binds people as a family may vary but what fundamentally defines and identifies them as a family is being able to behave or operate like a family or do what families are normally expected to do together. Individuals categorise themselves and other fellow human beings into social groups. As a result of these categorisations the roles of individuals in the society are created and demarcated (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). This characterises social identity. It gives rise to a sense of belonging.

Ms Assertive values family. Attesting to that, amongst others, is the stage when she opted to buy her own house but her mother was firmly not sold by the idea. She then decided to abandon the idea. She relates that:

> *"So they [her siblings] are all married, it's only myself and my younger sister who are not married. And we are still living in my home because when I wanted to buy my house, my mom said, "no!" "Now at home it is mom, my younger sister, myself and the other, labantwana bethu [our children]. I love my family so much. When I buy I buy for everybody, I don't concentrate only on my son; my son, my sister's children and her children."*

The value Ms Assertive puts on her family is priceless and family interests preceded her personal interests. To keep the family intact, she listened to her mother and sacrificed her ambitions of owning a house. She does not give her son preferential treatment, she equitably provides for everyone in the household.

Ms Assertive does not know how she coped with the loss of her fiancé who was buried on the day when they were to exchange vows. She even enlisted the services of a psychologist in order to deal with this loss. During the times of distress she knew who her reliable pillar was, her family. Even when some family members did not express their support in words but she appreciated that they shed tears together with her even over the phone. Valuing family means she appreciates harmonious relations amongst family members for it is in the prevalence of harmony that a family support framework can be meaningful and effective. She understands that the "visibility" of family members in her life, even though in silence, means they stand with her in sickness and in health. Highlighting the above is the following:

> *So '97 [1997] I got this guy and then he started paying lobolos, membesos [loosely translated to bride price and gifts to the bride's in-laws respectively] and everything. On the day we were supposed to get married, it was his funeral. I can't say [how I coped with the loss] really, with that one I even went to a psychologist. By then my sister, we were staying together at home. Ey, that one is very close to my heart. She will come and we will cry naye angasho lutho nje [cry together without saying anything to each other]. We would look at each other and cry. My brother would call me and we will cry on the phone, nobody will say a word.*

Interaction amongst family members becomes the vehicle through which they create and share meanings amongst one another. It is through such interaction that family members are socialised about the convictions and values that undergirds their perspectives on issues like, *inter alia*, religion and education (Galvin, Braithwaite & Bylund, 2018). Communication plays a critical role in ensuring that family members mostly "sing from the same hymn book" on matters of common interests, in the main. In this vein, a sound relationship amongst the members of the family is very critical to the family functionality (Dai & Wang, 2015). In a bid to make sense of their world and premise their communication with such a world, people categorise other people into social groups. Such behaviour is referred to as social categorisation (Trepte, 2006). Belonging to a particular group or groups becomes a sense-making vehicle through which people share and communicate meanings to understand their worlds. How the

relationship of the school principal is with to the school family comprising teachers, learners and parents may determine whether the school, as a family, becomes functional.

Like family, from time to time, after a long day's work she buys and shares drinks with the staff members. Accordingly, she remarked:

> *There are teachers who stay behind after school to do their schoolwork, I remain behind with them. Mhlambe ngiyobona sekushaya o 4h00 [pm] abantu [teachers] abahambi. Ake ngiba distebhe, akenibuyeni bakithi sizokwehlisani ukushisa, safa istress. So it's important ukuthi ke sihlangane nje siphuzeni idrink [Perhaps around 16h00 I would realise that teachers are still at school. I interrupt them and invite them for drinks to de-stress them. It is important that we get together and enjoy drinks together]."*

This means she creates, deliberately so, platforms for enjoying lighter moments and cherishes such moments which may further entrench the spirit of belonging to a family. Given this context, it follows that each family defines itself, for itself, through communication (Galvin, Braithwaite & Bylund, 2018). Sharing drinks together may, through verbal and non-verbal communication, characterise themselves for themselves as a school family.

6.2.3 A direction-setting organisational figure

Teachers are generally leaders within and beyond the bounds of their classrooms (Lai & Cheung, 2015) even though they may not occupy officially designated school leadership positions. One of the fundamental functions of leadership, including that of teacher leaders, is direction-setting. This key function intends to assist stakeholders to construct common understandings regarding organisational mandates which then delivers a persuasive common sense of intent (Sun & Leithwood, 2015). Such common understandings constitute the direction the organisation is or will be taking. For the school to have a collective direction it needs to have a shared vision. Direction setting becomes the translation of the constructs of the shared vision into action. To this end, a school needs to have a shared direction. Ms Assertive is an organisational direction-setter figure who ensures that every stakeholder is driven by shared direction. She affirmed:

> *So I made it clear [ensured] that everybody knows it [school vision] and we are all working in the same direction. This is the vision of the school and this is what we must do so that we can be able to achieve our vision. If I have a parents' meeting*

sengihamba nalento [vision banner], yini lento evulwayo? I even said it must be in your [teachers'] file, it must be in your classroom so that we are all on par; we are all on the same page as to what are we doing and why are we doing it.

School leaders need to articulate and live the direction they are setting and ensure that it effectively filters through the multiple layers of stakeholdership. This epitomises servant leadership. Using their persuasive skills to garner support, servant leaders employ conceptualisation of the direction the school needs to take or contemplate on taking going into the future (Spears, 1998). Conceptualisation is not self-serving but it seeks to serve the interests of the people who are led. As a Head of Department in the foundation phase she set the tone and modelled the work ethics for her phase which set her apart from her fellow counterpart in the intermediate and senior phase. Even when the senior phase teachers left early after their HOD has unofficially released the school early, Ms Assertive and the foundation phase teachers remained behind until the official closing time. These teachers remained behind even in the absence of both their HOD and the school principal. She recollects:

If the principal and I were not at school, the intermediate and senior phase HOD will dismiss the school at 11h00. And the teachers in my phase will say, we are not going anywhere we are teaching up to 13h30. May be even if I'm absent and the principal is absent."

The vision and mission of the school was already in existence however it was not articulated to the stakeholders which may explain the culpable behaviour of the intermediate and senior phase HOD.

However excellent the vision and particularly, the direction set may be; if it is not effectively communicated to and shared by the stakeholders, its existence becomes practically futile (Kunnanatt, 2016). If it is only the leader, designated or not designated, that knows the direction, the followers may get lost or stuck or find their preferred directions in the midst of confusion and uncertainty. The remaining behind of the foundation phase teachers after their colleagues had left early indicates that there was a shared direction amongst these teachers. Ms Assertive set the direction for the foundation phase. She lived the direction she set as she remained behind together with her colleagues. The school principals are not above the direction they set for their schools.

What guides the school leaders in the articulation of the direction emanating from the school vision and mission is an educational philosophy and beliefs which are premised on personal experiences, sound/rigorous research and reflective practice (Mombourquette, 2017). Personal experiences are unique and they may not reflect exposure to or appreciation of different school contexts. Further, it is my contention that not all school leading figures are exposed to or are inclined to read educational research. Without research, it may be difficult for these figures to set a meaningful, progressive direction that is responsive to an ever-changing realm of educational practice.

6.2.4 A proactive teacher

Self-initiating and future-targeting actions that seek to either transform an individual or an individual's workplace environment constitute proactivity (Strauss & Parker, 2014). Proactive personalities, on their own accord and based on understanding the urgency of rapid response, go beyond the prescriptions of their job descriptions driven by the urge to change the current organisational state and being future conscious. These personalities (teachers) are proactive in their thinking, planning and actions as it assist them in ameliorating the impact of the inherently uncertain contemporary educational environment on their schools.

Ms Assertive is a proactive teacher. In her previous school, the enrolment was high when she started however it gradually diminished. Consequently, she and other colleague were declared being in excess to the staff establishment according to rationalisation and redeployment policies at the time. She initiated the idea of introducing computer literacy at the school, which other neighbouring schools did not have, in order to attract learners back to the school. She pitched the idea to the school principal who was unhesitantly sold to it. She then "actioned" the proposal and as envisaged, learners retuned to the school. This constituted proactive behaviour. Ms Assertive understood the complexity of the environment in terms of a plummeting school population as a result of increased school choices in the area. She initiated changes that sought to address the current challenges and set the school on a technological trajectory in anticipation of future demands of the 21st century classroom. In this vein, proactivity challenges the existing state of affairs and leads on to strive towards what possibly will be or should be the state of affairs (Strauss & Parker, 2014). Ms Assertive did not allow environmental forces to constrain her. Ms Assertive shares the following:

> *So while there were still negotiations [our transfers] I went to the principal and said because of this R and R (Rationalisation and Redeployment) thing can we*

introduce something new in the school. Because when we started in that school, it was a big school but because of the government building these new schools, unnecessary schools so we started losing enrolment. So I asked the principal to give me a right to apply for computers so we can have a computer room maybe so that learners will come [back]. Because it will be only school in the area having computer room in the school. So the principal was very supportive, he granted me the opportunity to do that and I did that. I applied [for sponsorship], fortunate for me I got twelve computers from Old Mutual. So fortunately, we ended up not going where we were supposed to go. Learners came back when they heard about this computer thing.

Faced with the dynamic complexities of school environments, teachers as leaders and school principals need to shift towards proactive thinking, planning and execution of their leadership responsibilities in order to effect desired change processes without being derailed from the core business (Wu & Wang, 2011). In essence, this means teachers and principals need to recognise opportunities for changes and visualise a different future to the current state of their schools (Strauss & Parker, 2014). She denounces reactive leadership which only reacts once a phenomenon has unfolded. Instead she embraces proactive innovative initiatives to overhaul the status quo for the betterment of the future of her school. Such proactivity embodies foresight which is one of the constructs of servant leadership. It also involves empowering learners which ultimately empowers and builds the community (Greenleaf, 1977). Such empowering leadership may instil the culture of proactive behaviour amongst the school community which may enhance organisational effectiveness.

Notwithstanding the above, proactivity may have its potential drawbacks. Though it is important to inspire proactive behaviour, equally so, people need to be encouraged to pursue proactive behaviour that is aligned with the vision and the real life needs of the organisation thereby enhancing school effectiveness in this case (Strauss & Parker, 2014). Ms Assertive's idea of introducing computer literacy responded to the immediate challenges of her school. Moreover, being sold on this idea suggested that the school principal sought to breed a fertile environment for proactivity.

6.3 Mr Communist's meanings and understandings of self that he draws on in his leadership practice

Mr Communist's meanings and understandings of self are presented under the following sub-themes: a resilient mortal, acting *in loco paterfamilias* as an elder sibling, a caring pedagogue and a motivating educationalist.

6.3.1 A resilient mortal

Resilience refers to an individual's set of behaviours that reflect the ability to make sense of changes, effectively respond to and cope with adversities without being overwhelmed or feeling defeated (Hodges, 2017). Individuals who are resilient are considered to be imaginative intellectually and able to avoid adversity (John & Srivastava, 1999; Lazaridou & Beka, 2015) or deflect adversity. Resilient people are able to "get on their feet again" after challenges, some of which may be unexpected, or in the face of challenges without giving up on what they have set out to achieve. Mr Communist recounts how he tried to bounce back in the face of predicaments he experienced in his personal life:

> *When my father passed on I was doing standard three. Umamkhulu [first wife] who was paying my school fees and doing everything for me just stopped. That time my mother was unemployed and had to find work for the first time. She worked as a domestic worker for Indian families. When I was still in high school I used to work on Saturdays and during holidays so that I can assist. Then when I finished matric I started getting part-time jobs and assisted to raise my siblings.*

Even in the wake of changing family circumstances Mr Communist did not retreat. He did not drop out of school. Instead, he found ways of mitigating the adverse impact of the unanticipated changes by finding part-time jobs to supplement his mother's income. This constituted resilience. Part-time jobs became the means of evading the maximum impact of adversity; involving loss of a breadwinner, withdrawal of his maintenance by *mamkhulu* [first wife] and his mother having to work as a domestic worker. Mr Communist's assisting in the household suggests that his mother's income was not enough. Mr Communist relates:

> *My ambition was to become a Chartered Accountant (CA). We were two hundred when we wrote matric. I was amongst the twenty three that passed but I could not qualify for university because I did not meet the university entrance requirements. After I explained that my results will not qualify me admission to university, she*

said that even if I gained entrance, the question was how I was going to afford university. I started to look for temporary jobs. In 1985 I got a temporary post as a teacher. I started to develop an interest of being a teacher which was a better fall-back position since I did not have an exemption. So I wanted to be a teacher now.

Confronting the setback of failing to meet the university entrance requirements Mr Communist did not despair. He was prepared to improve his results in order to obtain matric exemption but his mother raised the issue of affordability of university fees. Even after this setback, he still explored other possibilities. This mirrors interaction between Mr Communist and his environment, particularly individual growth opportunities at his disposal and their accessibility (Ungar, 2012). His dream of becoming a CA was shattered but he remained determined to obtain a professional qualification hence his triggered interest in the teaching fraternity. Mr Communist recollects:

I was employed as a teacher by the Bureau for Language and Literacy (BLL). So I was able to save because I wanted to go to college. I was accepted at Indumiso College of Education. I knew the money I had saved would pay for one year but I was determined to go there. BLL went all out assisting me to get bursaries. I got a bursary from the Anglican Church to pay for the second and third years.

This indicates that resilience refuses to be deterred by adversities, instead it focuses on opportunities in the midst of adversity (Lazaridou & Beka, 2015). Unable to go to university, Mr Communist saved money to go to college to train as a teacher. He even roped in his employers to help him secure financial assistance. Critical to Mr Communist's self-image was being a member of a professional group (social group) since positive social comparisons translate into positive social identity which improves self-esteem (Trepte, 2006). Qualifying as a CA, his initial dream, and later, alternatively as a teacher would accord him with positive social identity status thereby subsequently enhancing his self-esteem.

6.3.2 Acting *in loco paterfamilias* as an elder sibling

After his father's death, Mr Communist assumed a fathering role at home. Fathering refers to the sum total of practices involving nurturing, love, protection, guidance and the father's stamps of approval to his children (Leonard, 1966). Included in practices of modern-day fathering are spending time and fostering relationships with kids, provision of basic needs and

parental guidance, protection, support and teaching them social and personal skills (Baxter, 2012; Meah & Jackson, 2015). Mr Communist assumed a fathering role in the household and his siblings recognised him as such. He shared breadwinning responsibilities with his mother. He showed love and provided support and parental guidance by taking the initiative of moving his brother to another school to shield him from having his academic school year interrupted as a result of politically-inspired township violence. This indicates that, as a father figure, he is directly involved in planning for the kids' (siblings) future. Mr Communist gave an account of how he filled his father's boots to assist the family to make ends meet:

> *I used to work on Saturdays at La Lucia. When I finished matric I started getting part-time jobs and assisted to raise my siblings. I was doing first year at Indumiso. My brother, who was doing standard nine, came to the campus to ask for money and exercise books because I supported him before I registered. When there was political violence at Ntuzuma, I had to arrange for him to move to Kwa-Swayimane. So he thought I'm still playing that father role to him.*

Even when he started working as a teacher, Mr Communist remained committed to his fathering role. He prioritised improving socioeconomic conditions at home. He continued to be his household provider. Mr Communist narrates:

> *When I started working as a teacher, things were bad at home; no houses, no beds, no food, everything. So I had to build my home, I had to start from scratch. I was taking a lot of money to my mother.*

This means he considered the provision of basic needs like food and shelter to be his fathering responsibility.

It is not only biological fathers who nurture their children but also social fathers, and other non-biological father figures who may stand in at different intervals where necessary (Ratele, Shefer & Cloves, 2012). Being a social father may not necessarily mean being physically present in the household of a child to discharge fathering roles. Mr Communist pronounces:

> *At some point we had a cleaner post at school. The SGB wanted to deploy a comrade into this post and as a school, I wanted an old lady who had been cooking in the school. She was earning hundred and fifty rand a month. Her husband is working in Johannesburg. He sends money this month and next month he won't*

send anything. I wanted this woman to benefit from this post because she had been loyal to the school for quite some time. Eventually, she was appointed.

As a social father, Mr Communist metaphorically provided for this lady's household by ensuring that she got appointed as the cleaner at the school. This suggests that she was going to receive a stable and reliable income. In the absence of this lady's husband – a father in the household and his delinquent behaviour regarding his maintenance responsibilities, Mr Communist symbolically took over the fathering role of breadwinning, providing and protecting this lady. He stood up and shielded this lady, like a father would do for his family, from being deprived of an opportunity to alleviate the impact of her husband's inconsistent household maintenance. In the South African context, the conception of a social father strongly prevails; which is an assigned status rather that an achieved status (Richter, Chikovore & Makusha. 2010). Mr Communist was not a father (in biological terms) in that old lady's household though he discharged some fathering responsibilities. Being socially identified as a father or "social father" prescribes and describes the qualities that fathers should subscribe to (Stets & Burke, 2000). Mr Communist's behaviour is shaped by this social identity.

6.3.3 A caring pedagogue

Mr Communist became a caring pedagogue at the school. Caring is considered to involve observation and assessment of, identification with, and response to situations, needs, interests, joys and concern of others (Smylie, Murphy & Louis, 2016). It embraces the expression of particular positive virtues like being compassionate, empathetic and respectful (van Dierendock & Patterson, 2015). Learning about the grave threat to the life of one of their learners, Mr Communist identified with the learner by making transport arrangements that minimised that albino learner's risk of being kidnapped. He put himself in that learner's boots which reflected his respect for humankind. This indicates that having or showing emotions of concern is not enough, caring involves acting on those concerns for the well-being of others. Mr Communist recalls how he had been providing caring environment in his line of duty:

A grade three learner at my school lives with albinism. At some point there was a threat that people with albinism are taken by so called izinyanga [traditional doctors] to be killed and their body parts to be used for umuthi purposes. So there was that attempt of kidnapping around the area. As a school we feared for that learner. We arranged with one educator that she fetches this learner from home in

the morning and I took her home in the afternoon. I did that for some time until the threat diminished.

Mr Communist further recalls how he executed his caring missions:

I did not have shoes in grade six. I struggled up to grade ten. So that background makes me not only to be a teacher but also to be a social worker. I look at what the child's needs are and I go out to find whatever that kid needs. I tell my colleagues, let's go out and find sponsors that can sponsor the buying of jerseys, shoes for learners who don't have and keep them warm in winter. We, as teachers, fortunately some had the same poor background as me; organised uniforms from the municipality and companies that provide some service in the area. I even approached Inkosi (chief) of the area to assist us with uniforms.

Intervention of care is substitutive in nature. The care provider intervenes by taking over the responsibility for an imminent or existing challenge or predicament and guides or leads how it is resolved as the care provider thinks fit (Tomkins & Simpson, 2015). Mr Communist acted as a substitute by making it his mission to ensure that he enlisted the financial assistance of the people who could buy school uniform for learners who could not afford. To Mr Communist, caring is not only about what he does however it is also about why and how he does it (Smylie. Murphy & Louis, 2016). He assumes a social worker role and identifies learners who need school uniform or some uniform items. He mobilises his colleagues to canvass sponsorship for these learners. Mr Communist understands the plight of these learners because as a learner himself, he contended with the same challenge. He "understands from experience."

Furthermore, caring and the associated virtue of compassion have been linked to inhibition of workplace-related anxiety and organisational commitment (Tomkins & Simpson, 2016). This suggests that if teachers are compassionate towards vulnerable learners, it may alleviate the stress of being different from their peers in terms of being unable to, unintentionally so, discharge learner responsibilities, amongst others. Alleviation of such stress may translate into these learners being enabled to commit more to school. Mr Communist recounts:

I had a mother who took care of me. Some learners do not have parents at all. Others stay with the granny and have to take care of ugogo (granny). Others have their siblings, who are doing grade eight, as heads of households. So I have to understand those situations, so it helps me to be compassionate; not to be harsh

when some learners cannot produce work. I have to go deep to find learners like that so that I create space for them to do homework while I am still at school.

Driven by compassion, Mr Communist applies a waiver to instances where learners are unable to submit tasks like their counterparts due to family background constraints. Instead, he makes alternative arrangements to afford these learners the opportunity to catch up with their counterparts in terms of work progress.

6.3.4 A motivating educationalist

Motivation refers to an individual internal process that involves instigating and sustaining goal-driven behaviours or activities. Therefore, motivation is characterised as being a process, goal-focused, and dealing with initiating and maintaining behaviours or activities which are aimed at attaining that particular goal (Cook & Artino, 2016). This means the inner state of self swings the outer self into calculated actions commensurate with the goals set. Mr Communist's inner cognitive state kick-started and energised his pursuit of continuing professional development in the quest to refine his craft. He was motivated to develop himself. Mr Communist tells his development tales:

You must be a lifelong learner if you are a teacher. So I need to be developed now and then. I had to further my studies through distance education. I registered at UNISA immediately. I started working in 1990, then in 1991 I registered with UNISA. I started with one course. I failed. I left UNISA for Natal College to do a Higher Diploma in Education between 1992 and 1993. I passed. I went back to UNISA in 1995 with more energy now. I finished my degree in 1999. I registered for Masters in Applied Linguistics but I dropped out because of marital challenges. In 2009 I did Honours in Education Management at the University of Pretoria which I finished in 2012. In fact, I had that in mind that one day I will to have a PhD degree.

Furthering his studies enthused Mr Communist as he believes that a teacher needs to engage in continuing professional development. To Mr Communist, developing oneself professionally is not an option but a teaching practice imperative. Despite the setbacks of failing his first year at UNISA and dropping out of the Master's degree programme respectively, he still persisted. He was motivated to soldier on. He still sounds motivated and remain steadfast in his determination to engage in lifelong learning. This is best captured in his following announcement: *"There is*

a course I want to do in financial management or Certificate in Accounting because some schools approach me requesting assistance regarding management of school finances." To this day, Mr Communist's motivation to develop professionally stands unwavering.

Mr Communist did not contain his aura of motivation to himself, he wanted it to diffuse to the learners he taught. While he, himself, stays motivated; he provides a motivational framework for the learners. To this end, he became a "motivated" motivator. Reminiscent of his motivation engagements, he shares the following:

> *I'm teaching grade seven. With that class we share a lot. What I share with grade seven I cannot share it with the whole school because we cannot always talk about myself. Fortunately, I grew up at Ogunjini, which is here at Ndwedwe but where I'm teaching is more remote than where I am from. I always tell them about my background that was very poor. I always tell them I grew up in almost the same background, we used to fetch water, dirty water, from the river; use it for drinking and washing. We used to fetch wood from the forest to make fire. I instil it into them that no matter how difficult their lives are at home, it is not permanent. What will change their situation is education. So when they are at school they have to give it their all.*

Mr Communist makes it his mission to motivate his learners. He understands that they come from poor family backgrounds which is the similar predicament he contended with growing up in the same rural area. Mr Communist conscientises learners that he is the "living example" of a success story of one's commitment to education irrespective of one's socioeconomic background. He assures them that whatever current family circumstances they are facing, such circumstances may not persists in a perpetual continuum if they commit to education. Mr Communist's self-motivation galvanises him to motivate his learners, a goal which is influenced by situational factors, personal inclinations or the former and latter's interaction (Heckhausen & Heckhausen, 2018). Mr Communist's motivational content mirrors his vantage point that he was born and bred in Ndwedwe, comes from an indigent family background and he teaches in the same area.

6.4 Ms Passionate's meanings and understandings of self that she draws on in her leadership practices

Ms Passionate's meanings and understandings of self are presented and discussed under the following sub-themes: a resilient country girl, a community builder resident, a revolutionary teacher and a teacher leader "in the making".

6.4.1 A resilient country girl

Having the stamina to effectively adapt to adversities that jeopardise one's day-to-day functionality or development is referred to as resilience (Masten, 2014). Resilience is the people's capacity to "bend but not break, bounce back" and develop or experience growth even amidst adverse episodes in their lives (Southwick, Bonanno, Masten, Panter-Brick & Yehuda, 2014, p. 2). Instead, a resilient individual's behaviour reflect conscious endeavours to soldier on as a result of lessons harvested from such adverse episodes (Southwick, Bonanno, Masten, Panter-Brick & Yehuda, 2014). A state of resilience means being able to maintain a commensurate balance between the capacity to adapt and the adverse life experiences, anticipated or unanticipated, that threaten to impair functionality or growth of an individual. Ms Passionate comes from an indigent family background. However, even in the wake of being mocked by school mates for wearing used school uniform, she still remained at school. Ms Passionate recalled how she had to contend with being taunted by other learners at school:

> *We were poor. We didn't have shoes. My mother worked as a domestic worker. My mother couldn't even buy me uniform for high school. She told me to look for second-hand uniform, which I did. At school, there were three grown up girls who said to me, "Come here, whose uniform is this?" they could see it was someone's uniform whom they know, a KwaMashu girl. I said I bought it. They literally laughed at me and I cried.*

Falling pregnant in grade 11 did not deter Ms Passionate from going back to school despite challenges within her own family and the community at large. Her uncles were very traditional, they did not believe in education. Therefore, they made Ms Passionate's mother a laughing stock for having sent her to school. Ms Passionate recalls, *"My uncles were traditional. They didn't talk about church. No one was schooling at our uncles' home. For our uncles education was useless, especially for the girls. They started laughing when I fell pregnant"* In the community, ordinarily, all the girls who had had babies while still at school did not return to

school to pursue their studies. Ms Passionate was the first girl in the community to "bounce back" (go back to school) after having had a baby. Her uncles did not stop laughing when she decided to "pick up the pieces" and go back to class. Reminiscent of the unplanned pregnancy setback, Ms Passionate shared the following:

> *There came this boy, we fell in love. I passed grade 11 but I had to give birth to my first daughter in 1978. In the community, a girl [unmarried] who had had a baby was shut out, you can't mix with other girls who do not have babies. My mother was very strong. She said, "Give birth to your baby and go back to school." I told my mother I could not go back to school in that community as they said if you were umfazi [girl with a baby] you could not go back to school. In 1979 I had to go back to a school at KwaMashu to do grade 12. I was the first girl in the community to have a baby and go back to school. My uncles were still laughing at me and my mother.*

Falling pregnant again after matric did not derail Ms Passionate from becoming a professional. She wanted to go to college to train as a teacher but she could not afford college fees. Consequently, she opted to work as an unqualified, non-state-paid teacher at one of the schools at Ndwedwe in 1980. It was towards the end of the same year that she was impregnated by the same man. Being resilient, she was able to "bend but did not break". Despite being married in 1981 and having two kids, one in 1979 and one in 1981, the following year she registered at a teacher training institution. Ms Passionate explains second pregnancy and its aftermath:

> *I wanted to be a Privately Paid Teacher (PPT) [not state-paid] because there was no money to go to college. I got a PPT post at a secondary school at Ndwedwe. At the end of that year I fell pregnant again. Then in 1981, after being a PPT in 1980, I married this man with two kids. In 1982 I started training at a college of education. I got my diploma, Primary Teachers' Diploma.*

Characterising resilience**,** amongst others, are resistance to impact of adversities, capacity to progressively influence one's future, being optimistic and grounded sense of self (Bonanno & Manani, 2008). It is to this end that in the face of significant setbacks, Ms Passionate did not succumb to impact; instead she steadfastly remained "standing" until she qualified as a professional teacher. Similarly, 21st century school principals contend

with a rapidly changing educational environment, increased accountability and leading change processes, therefore they need to have a commensurate dose of resilience to be able to navigate these realities (Leithwood & Lewis, 2012; Sardar & Galdames, 2018). In the face of challenges, it is evident that lack of resilience from school principals can derail the vision and mission of the school.

6.4.2 A community builder resident

Community building refers to the process characterised by the sum total of activities by individuals or groups which are aimed at enhancing the livelihoods of the community (Checkoway, 2015). Community development has community building as its constituent part (Karlis, 2015). The common denominator between the two is the process of change which is people-driven to address their immediate actualities for the betterment of their communities (Karlis, 2015). Engaging in activities that seek to enhance the well-being of the community and create better neighbourhoods which are self-reliant constitute community building. Ms Passionate is a community builder. Hearing the complaints of teachers from the townships about the young ones who would be in tears and do anything that the nature "sends" them to do anywhere at school, she took the initiative to facilitate the building of an early childhood development centre. There was no such centre in the area. She announced how she facilitated the construction:

> *I looked at my community, it was illiterate. There were no crèches or Early Childhood Development institutions. I would hear teachers form Umlazi and KwaMashu complaining about kids that cry and "release" themselves anywhere at school. It would pain me as a resident in the area. I decided to try something. So I built two crèches near my home. I applied for sponsors. It was Tongaat Huletts who built the first crèche. The other one was built by my brother together with my brother-in-law.*

After the community had donated the land for the construction of a new school in the area and the Department of Education had approved the application, the challenge was infrastructure as there were no school buildings on site, but just an open veld. Ms Passionate provided temporary floor space for the new school at the crèche. Her current school opened its doors for the first time at that crèche that she and her family,

individually and collectively, had facilitated its construction. Ms Passionate recollects the early beginnings of her current school:

> *There came a Mhloli (today Circuit Manager) from Ndwedwe Circuit to tell my principal that the Department of Education has allowed you and your induna to have a school. These people had given the Department land to build the school. So when they wanted this school to start there were no buildings. This school started in that crèche. Mhloli requested the Area Development Committee, of which I was the secretary, for permission to use the crèche. We started there with my thirty one grade one learners.*

Fundamental to the process of community building is the capacity to join hands, maintain involvement of others and cultivate a sense of shared destiny (Karlis, 2015). Ms Passionate collaborated with her own family and other stakeholders to provide a solution to a community problem. Evidently, sustained community development depends, amongst others, on sustainability of sound relationships amongst all stakeholders in the community (Checkoway, 2015; Karlis, 2015). As a stakeholder in the process of community building, school principals need to forge quality partnerships with the community that the school serves. It is in such quality relationships that a common purpose is identified and realised.

6.4.3 A revolutionary educator

For modern day teachers to be able to deal with 21st century realities, they need to overhaul their teaching and learning approaches, practices and methodologies (Johnson, 2013; Kern, 2012; Misha & Mehta, 2017). It is crucial that teachers bring fresh ideas into the classroom in response to global educational developments and challenges (Klaeijsen, Vermeulen & Martens, 2018). This requires teachers to be innovative or revolutionary in their attitudes and approaches to their day-to-day classroom practices if they are to respond effectively to these actualities. Teachers' innovative behaviour involves self-originated activities aimed at revolutionising their practices including, *inter alia*, coining, modification or application of new ideas to the benefit of their learners (Klaeijsen, Vermeulen & Martens, 2018; Thurlings, Evers & Vermeulen, 2015). Ms Passionate was revolutionary in her approach to educational practices. Even though the policy required

that foundation phase be taught in IsiZulu, Ms Passionate decided to teach her learners in English. A departmental official sounded impressed when he observed her in action in class during one of the visits. Ms Passionate remembered the moment and shared the following:

> *In my previous school I was teaching my class in English. I was teaching them English, I remember one day the SEM (Superintendent Education Management. Today called Circuit Manager) came for inspection. He came to my class. He kept on saying, "Wow! That's nice." Because I was interacting with my kids in English, young as they were.*

Starting at a new school, Ms Passionate understood that she had to be revolutionary in her approach so that people could recognise the new school, particularly at the time when children from the area migrated to ex-model C schools. To Ms Passionate, it did not make educational sense that they should teach learners in IsiZulu since those learners who migrated to ex-model C were going to be taught in English. Ms Passionate captured the moments as follows:

> *For people to realise that there is a [new] school here, I have to teach differently. Another challenge in 1997 was that kids were moving from here to ex-model C schools. Policy is saying that we must teach learners in IsiZulu. My argument was why we are teaching them in IsiZulu since those kids who were moving from this area to Verulam, as illiterate as they were (not proficient in English), were going to be taught in English. What is the difference? Then I said, "Grade 1, I'm going to teach you English, we are going to communicate in English.*

Innovative teaching may include the following: using modified or new teaching materials, utilising new approaches to teaching and a change of belief systems regarding teaching practices (Fullan, 2007). The dramatic shift from policy position and responding to immediate realities required that Ms Passionate uses new materials, strategies or methodologies and that she transforms her beliefs regarding her educational practices. If learners who migrated to ex-model C schools were to be taught in English, she believed that those who were left behind in her classroom could also equally be taught in English.

Given the contrasting two-tier landscape of South African education system consisting of schools that are first world compatible and those that are third world compatible (Chikoko, Naicker & Mthiyane, 2015) school principals in the latter tier need to be revolutionary in their approaches to school leadership. It is critical that school principals display extra-role behaviour if their schools are to thrive or survive (Tuominen & Toivonen, 2011) the impact of this educational landscape legacy of apartheid. Being revolutionary means school principals need to go beyond the "textbook" leadership practices and adopt contextually-responsive practices.

6.4.4 A teacher leader "in the making"

Teachers are leaders within and beyond the bounds of their classrooms. The expertise of teachers, individually and collectively, constitutes the school's professional capital which should be the vehicle through which educational change is brought about. To this end, teacher leadership is in essence transformational (Lai & Cheung, 2015). Furthermore, teacher leaders, like Ms Passionate, do not occupy officially designated positions. They acquire their recognition owing to their practices and expert knowledge capital (Lai & Cheung, 2015). Other than revolutionising her teaching approaches at school (refer to 6.4.3), Ms Passionate also assumed a leadership role in cultural activities, particularly traditional music genres. This constituted teacher leadership. She acquired knowledge of these genres from her uncles. She even wrote songs for her learners. The silverware she left behind in her previous school spoke volumes about her successes in this field. Ms Passionate announced how she developed learners in traditional music:

> *I was very good at Isicathamiya (traditional music genre). My uncles were doing Ingoma, Isicathamiya and Imbube [traditional music genres]. I had learnt Isicathamiya from them. I became a leader of Isicathamiya at my previous school. I composed songs and I would go as far as Ulundi with my boys. There are trophies there [previous school].*

The principal of Ms Passionate's previous school appeared to have identified her leadership potential. She nurtured this leadership potential by affording Ms Passionate the opportunity to lead though it was unofficial, informal designation. She explicitly showed that she believed in Ms Passionate. This suggests that she recognised Ms

Passionate as a school leader in the making as she later recommended her for an acting principalship post. This is what Ms Passionate shared regarding the above-mentioned period:

> *I do not know what the principal saw in me, she gave me a position. There was this vice principal [today deputy principal] thing, vice principal verbally [informal/unofficial designation] and there were no incentives [monetary]. Then she announced, "Ms Passionate is going to be my vice principal. So I became the vice principal. She would go perhaps for three months and I would stand in for her. When I was given a chance to assume principalship somewhere, she would refuse and say, "I'm using her here." However, when this school [current school] was founded and she was asked by Mhloli to release one of her teachers to head this school, she said, "Ms Passionate is very good, you can take her."*

Affording Ms Passionate legitimacy to assume leadership responsibilities was teacher empowerment. Teacher empowerment involves power-sharing by the teachers and their principals thereby affording teachers legitimate participation in leadership practice (Lai & Cheung, 2015). It is my contention that such power-sharing opportunities are consciously given to or ought to be given to teachers who display potential qualities of being leaders in the making; which is Ms Passionate in this case. It is in this context that teacher identity is considered to be evolutionary as it is modelled and re-modelled in the process of interactive engagements with counterparts within a professional environment (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009). A teacher may evolve from being a teacher leader to becoming a designated school leader. Distinctly setting teacher leaders apart from their ordinary counterparts is their distinguished capacity for agency and challenging others to push their boundaries of professional competencies (Lai & Cheung, 2015; Tsui, 2009). With these qualities, school principals are able to take initiative or intervene to render a support framework and drive professional growth to ensure that they manage change effectively and their schools remain relevant to the mandate to deliver quality education.

6.5 Ms Elegant's meanings and understandings of self that she draws on in her leadership practice

This section presents and discusses meanings and understandings of self as follows: a *kasi* (township) lass with a capacity to "bounce back", an entrepreneurial schoolgirl, a social justice activist pedagogue and a unionist teacher.

6.5.1 A *kasi* lass with the capacity to "bounce back"

Having the capacity to "bounce back" from a crisis or a series of crises means being resilient (Cinderby, Haq, Cambridge & Lock, 2016). Resilience is not an episodic activity or final state of being but it embraces individuals' adaptation and growth trajectories in the face of adversity landscape and uncertainty over time (Southwick, Martini, Charney & Southwick, 2016). To this end, resilient individuals envision a future of possibilities by acknowledging that crises or adversities will occur, anticipated or unanticipated, looking out for adverse experiences that may derail their progress and seeking to exploit opportunities that arise in the midst of such experiences (Lazaridou & Beka, 2015). Ms Elegant has been able to absorb the impact of, adapt to, recover from adversities and focus her energies on what she wanted to achieve. She refused to be distracted and she refused to break, instead she seized opportunities at her disposal in order to thrive irrespective of adversities. This characterises resilience. Coming from a poor family, Ms Elegant accepts that some people are prone to exploit that reality. She fell pregnant while doing standard 9 (today grade 11). She had to drop out of school. After giving birth she went back school to complete grade twelve because she wanted to do something progressive with her life. This guy, who impregnated her, paid *ilobolo* (very loosely translated to bride price) for her while she was only sixteen. She tied the knot at a tender age of eighteen. This matrimonial union did not last that long as it was not a happy one. Ms Elegant shared the following about the marriage episode of her life:

> *You know people, if they see you've got challenges at home and you are young and beautiful, they would take advantage of you. When I was in standard 9 [today grade 11], I met a guy, I fell pregnant. I had to drop out of school. Fortunately I had that courage that I want to become something. I delivered my child, the following year I went back to school. I finished my*

grade 12. He paid ilobolo, I was sixteen years at that time. We got married while I was 18, doing grade 12 but life was not as easy as before because if you are married to someone life changes.

Though Ms Elegant did not have it easy in her marriage and given that she was still tender, she remained adamant in her quest to become the best she could be. Her husband was reluctant to allow her to further her studies but she did not succumb to that pressure. She explored other avenues that would enable her to fulfil her dream including, amongst others, securing financial resources from someone. These resources were used for registration at a teacher training institution. Her husband was not supportive at all. His actions reflected the attitude of being determined to see her fail on her college mission. Despite these adverse experiences, Ms Passionate remained resolute in her commitment to accomplish her mission. She related the following regarding this episode of her life:

I had that in mind that I still want to become something, I did not want to end like that in life. I proposed to him that I wanted to go back to school to do anything. It was not easy for him to agree and I took a decision of borrowing money from someone else. I got the money, I went to a college of education. My life was not easy in that first year because he was trying by all means to destroy me and not push me forward [not supportive]. He was trying to make me fail, he was setting me up for failure.

During Ms Elegant's first year at college, her mother passed on. She was only nineteen. Her mother was not working but she tried to provide for her family. Unlike herself, her siblings did not go that far at school. After the death of her mother her siblings began to scatter all over the place. Her siblings had kids that lived with her mother. Ms Elegant then had to stay with those seven kids. Her siblings began dying one by one until she was the only one left. Ms Elegant recounted challenges she faced while at college:

When I was doing my first year at college my mother passed on. I was only nineteen years old. After my mom passed on, life was not easy for me. Though my mother was not working she could make ends meet in terms of supporting us. My other siblings did not make it that far at school. I was the only one who managed to go as far as tertiary education. My siblings began to leave

home and they lived at different places. After that all of them died; one after the other. I'm the only one who is left at home now. My siblings had seven children. These children lived with my mother. After my mother's death, I had to live with these children.

In spite all these challenges, Ms Elegant managed to complete her teaching qualification. She was hired as a teacher. In 2003 she bought a car. Her husband crashed it. As a result of feeling inferior, she believes, her husband resorted to being abusive and antagonistic. She is not sure how she got this far in life as her life was supposed to end when her husband tried to kill her with a gun. She was chased out of the matrimonial house and her marriage officially ended in 2008. In her own words, Ms Elegant remembered the following moment:

I finished my teaching in 1999. Then I got a post. It was easy for me. I bought a car in 2003, it lasted six months. My husband wayishayisa (crashed it). I think he was full of complex [inferiority] because he started to be aggressive and abusive. I don't know how I got to where I am because my life was supposed to end in 2006 because he tried to shoot me but he couldn't succeed. I was chased out of the house in 2007. We got divorced in 2008.

Ms Elegant did not only survive the adversity, she recovered from impacts of adverse experiences and "thrived" in the wake of unsettling crises and setbacks she contended with in her environment (Southwick, Martini, Charney & Southwick, 2016). This epitomises resilience. Without being overwhelmed or "losing grip" on the vision and mission of their schools, resilient school principals have the capacity to contain the impact of adversities but most importantly, lead effectively in the midst of adversities. In this vein, resilience is one of the most critical attributes in a leader or anybody who seeks to live their lives meaningfully (Bennis, 2007). If school principals are resilient, the atmosphere of resilience may filter down to the teachers and other stakeholders which may ultimately culminate in a resilient school.

6.5.2 An entrepreneurial schoolgirl

Being able to identify, exploit entrepreneurial opportunities and act upon such opportunities with the intention of starting or growing a business constitute

entrepreneurial behaviour (Afsar, Badir, Saeed & Haffez, 2017; Van Dam, Schipper & Runhaar, 2010). This refers to the sum total of activities and behaviours which are business-related that people consciously and proactively engage in in the process of venturing into business in order to, in the main, make profits (Gruber & MacMillan, 2017). Since Ms Elegant's father passed on while she was two months old, she was raised by her mother who worked as a domestic worker. Ms Passionate's mother supplemented her income by selling *isiqatha* (traditional illicit beer) at Point Road (today Mahatma Ghandi Road), in Durban. On some occasions, Ms Passionate sold *isiqatha* together with her mother before she went to school. This constituted entrepreneurship. Reminiscent of these entrepreneurial ventures, Ms Elegant reported:

> *My father passed on when I was two months. I was raised by my mother as a single parent. She was working as a domestic worker. She was even selling utshwala (alcohol) that is called isiqatha, trying to make a living for us. While I was still young but I still remember she would wake up at 3h00 am, distil it and take it to Point Road, in Durban. At some other stage, we would go with her to sell and come back around 7h30 to prepare for school.*

Once she was in secondary school a neighbour observed that Ms Elegant was business-minded. The neighbour recruited her to join the business of selling used clothes which she did. Ms Elegant and the neighbour bought fruit and packed them into baskets which they exchanged for used clothes. They would move from one house to another looking for used clothes. Ms Elegant remembered this proposal:

> *One of my neighbours said to me, "Because I can see that you have a business mind, can you join me, I am selling old clothes. I will go in the morning and buy fruit for you and you will join me in the afternoon after school. We would prepare fruit baskets and go from flat to flat asking for old clothes.*

At this point this meant that Ms Elegant had to juggle her schoolwork with entrepreneurship in order to assist financially at home. This is the account she gave about this period:

> *While I was here in the secondary school, I remember that I was selling old clothes, in fact it was not selling it was an exchange of clothes and vegetables*

for old clothes. Then I would sell them during the weekend so that we will have money, supporting each other at home because I was coming from a very poor family.

Entrepreneurship behaviour involves channeling resources, which may be physical, financial or intellectual, that enable one to make the most of business opportunities in order to enhance one's income flow (Van Dam, Schipper & Runhaar, 2010). Ms Elegant used her resources to take advantage of opportunities prevalent in the market. Ms Elegant sold used clothes until she met someone who sold clothes which were bought abroad. Using the profits she generated from selling used clothes, she started to buy and sell imported clothes. It was at this point that gradually she began to afford to maintain her siblings' children. In her own words, this is what Ms Elegant had to say about venturing into sale of imported clothing:

I would go to school and come back, sell these second hand clothes up until I met one lady from the township. She was selling clothes from overseas. From the money that I was getting from these second hand clothes, I took some of it and gave it to her so that she would come back with clothes from overseas so that I will sell. That's how my life started to be smooth running and I could afford these children.

Ms Elegant embraced uncertainty instead of avoiding it, created opportunities where others could have seen challenges and lessons that were derived from taking considered risks (McGrath & MacMillan, 2000). These are some of the attributes of an entrepreneur. She went from selling *isiqatha* with her mother, to selling used clothes and ultimately dealing in imported fashion items. Instead of considering uncertainty as challenge, school principals need to identify opportunities, take advantage of them and use their learnings to anticipate the future. In educational practice, entrepreneurship entails school principals' capacity to explore approaches that are innovative, kindle creative and critical thinking amongst learners and teachers, constant pursuit of fresh educational developments and securing resources to facilitate teaching and learning (Van Dam, Schipper & Runhaar, 2010). Even in the wake of uncertainties, which may be borne out of turbulent policy environment amongst others, school principals are still expected to

enhance school improvement. For that to happen, school principals need an entrepreneurial mindset.

6.5.3 A social justice activist pedagogue

Some challenges in the realm of educational practice are addressed through teacher practices; predominantly those teachers that demonstrate transformative activism. Such activism seeks to transform the social order or dislodge the status quo by challenging and engaging the systems or structures that produce or reproduce social injustices with the aim of generating alternatives to status quo (Mills, Gale, Parker, Smith & Cross, 2019). This predisposition by teachers characterises social justice and teacher activism. It is in this context that activist teacher identity is described as possessing defined intentions of emancipating others through minimising or eradicating elements of oppression, unfair treatment or practices and inequalities within a system (Sachs, 2001). To this end, what always takes centre stage in activist teacher identity are social justice issues (Oyler, Morvay & Sullivan, 2017). Activist teachers are involved in the struggle against social injustices, whether they directly or vicariously affect them, which exists within and beyond the bounds of their classrooms. Their activism intends to facilitate a redress of such injustices, in this instance, for the benefit of the school. In her first school, Ms Elegant became an activist teacher. Observing the mistreatment of teachers by the school principal, she stood up against the principal's practices which earned her the stripe as their mouthpiece and subsequently, a South African Democratic Teachers' Union (SADTU) representative at site level. This is what she shared about her teacher activism:

> *We had differences with my previous school principal regarding the manner in which she treated us as teachers. There were teachers who were her favourites. She did not have a civilised approach towards us and she was not sociable. She did not give us the respect that we deserved. She even sent us to clean toilets. She did not even give us space to communicate with each other. If you signed in at half past seven, you would only leave your class at half past two. Not unless you were called at the office or not unless there is a staff meeting. This irritated me a lot and I was vocal amongst them all so they eventually decided to make me their SADTU site steward. That was when we began to see a breakthrough. From there onwards, my teachers began to*

see the difference, they could even wear smiles on their faces.

Given the above, Ms Elegant can be described as a teacher with professional identity which is emancipatory (Sachs, 2003). To create such an identity, an activist teacher has to traverse beyond the confines of pedagogy and curriculum and consciously act against the unjust world (Oyler, Morvay & Sullivan, 2017). Other than fulfilling her prescribed obligations as a teacher, Ms Elegant raised red flags and confronted the unprofessional and oppressive tendencies of the school principal which culminated in a relaxed professional atmosphere at the school. Though 21st century teachers still perform their conventional duties, concurrently their responsibilities are gradually becoming diverse as they also assume citizen and activist roles (Talbert & Rodgers, 2011). Being conscientised about social justice, school principals may be able to identify and redress injustices in their leadership practices, teacher practices, and learner behaviour and avoid becoming perpetrators of social injustice at their schools. Principals leading social justice in their schools may result in teachers and learners following suit thereby encouraging a conducive teaching and learning environment with minimised disciplinary challenges. To this end, social justice activism becomes every individual's mission in the school.

6.5.4 A unionist teacher

Formations that are established to promote and advance the collective interests of teachers and other workers in the education sector are referred to as teacher unions or, in some quarters, education unions (McCollow, 2017). Negotiating better salaries, better service benefits, enhanced working conditions and job security through collective bargaining processes become the key responsibility of teacher trade unions (Eberts, 2007). Teachers who are members of trade unions and take part in the activities of their union are unionists. Ms Elegant is a unionist teacher. She is a member of SADTU. Being vocal about working conditions at her school landed her the SADTU site steward position. Subsequently, she moved up the echelons of union leadership to regional level. Even at that level, she spoke her mind which was seemingly interpreted as breaking ranks with union line. Given this politics she had to tender her resignation as FTSS. Ms Passionate recounted experiences of her union activism:

I was seconded to regional SADTU Full-time Shop Steward (FTSS) position between 2009 and 2013. I was seconded to a higher structure, higher office.

> *I was there for five years. We were dissolved and chased out of the regional office. Fortunately I was the only one who remained because I had two positions at the same time. I was the FTSS and Sports, Arts and Culture convener. I decided to resign in 2014 because it was not easy. You know in these political things, if they see that you are strong and you can speak your mind you become a victim. People [peer leaders] dislike you if you speak your mind, they only like you if you toe the party line.*

Teachers who are union members should maintain a sound balance between their interests and those of the community at large (Shelton, 2018). Other than collective bargaining for teachers' interests, teacher unions, as legitimate structures, need to play a significant role in enhancing the quality of education by mobilising teachers to enhance their methods and approaches as well as maintain professional standards (Bascia, 2017; Mafisa, 2017). Teacher unions need to contribute meaningfully to educational reforms and professional development of their membership. For instance, teacher unions, like SADTU in South Africa, have initiated a different approach to the performance management systems of teachers (Bascia, 2017; Mafisa, 2017). Ms Elegant acknowledges the meaningful contributions of SADTU to her professional growth. Being at the helm of a SADTU region has shaped her current professional identity as a school principal. She declared that she understood policies and labour relations matters. Evidently, teacher unions are instrumental in enhancing the professional stature of teachers and are significant role-players in the nation building project (Mafisa, 2017; Maton, 2018) in terms of capacitating teachers. Ms Elegant recollected the following about union contributions to her professional identity:

> *Occupying that office helped me to understand labour issues better. For instance, I now understand exactly what action I should take regarding a teacher who commits a misconduct. This contributed to my growth in leadership. Being in SADTU leadership afforded me the opportunity to interact with people from different sectors and such interaction developed me professionally.*

Irrespective of where identities are constructed in terms of spaces, teachers are able to transfer these identities to new contexts to allow such identities to become a resource which traverse over time and space (Bloome, Carter, Christian, Otto & Shuart-Faris,

2005). In light of the above, developing fresh or different practices begins with the construction of identities which support such practices (Holland, Lachiotte, Skinner & Cain, 2001). Ms Elegant concedes that the professional capital she acquired while serving as a SADTU leader has made her the leader that she is today. Consequently, her union leadership became part of the constant process of construction and co-construction of her identity. In this vein, the dynamic and multifaceted nature of identity entails how to be, how to act and how to understand (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009). Having been a union leader and leading a unionised school environment shape the school principal's leadership terrain from time to time. Moreover, development of identity of the school principal is not static, instead it becomes an evolutionary process shaped by interaction with multiple internal and external contexts, the end result of which is reflected in day-to-day leadership practices. The evolutionary nature of identity is commensurate with the fluid nature of contexts within which school principals lead. Static identity may stagnate leadership practices which may then fail to mirror and respond to the constantly changing landscape of the school environment.

6.6 Chapter conclusion

This chapter dealt with the personal and professional meanings and understandings that the participant school principals draw on in their leadership practice. These meanings and understandings are inextricably linked to each other. Even though in this chapter these meanings and understandings are presented as personal and professional, in practice the lines are blurred. I have observed that the personal meanings and understandings of school principals play out in their professional meanings and understandings and vice versa. I have realised that the process of construction and co-construction of their identities as school principals is uniquely carved out. Collectively, all their life episodes constitute their individual identities as school leaders.

The next chapter responds to the last research sub-puzzle: *"What are the day-to-day leadership practices of these school principals of rural primary schools?"* This chapter then presents the leadership practices of all participants.

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE LEADERSHIP PRACTICES OF SCHOOL PRINCIPALS

7.1 Introduction

Chapter Six presented the analysis of narratives (which is the second level of analysis) for the second research sub-puzzle of the study. The second research sub-puzzle addressed the following, *"What meanings and understandings do the principals draw on in their leadership of rural primary schools?"* This chapter, a sequel to the previous chapter, presents the last section of the analysis of narratives. It responds to the third research sub-puzzle, *"What are the day-to-day leadership practices of these principals of rural primary schools?"* The chapter discusses the leadership practices of school principals as they are informed by their personal and professional meanings and understandings.

Chapter Seven cuts across all participants as it presents the themes that emerged after careful consideration of the narratives of all participants. In presenting the analysis of leadership practices I draw on Dwyer and Emerald (2017) who refer to themes that are common amongst many of the participants as commonalities of experience and those that may be peculiar to only one or two of the participants as particularities of experience. Out of seven themes that emerged, there are four commonalities and three particularities of experience. The chapter commences with the commonalities of experience followed by the particularities of experience.

7.2 Commonalities of experience among the participants

The commonalities of experience are *izandla ziyagezana* (one hand washes the other) as metaphor for Ubuntu practices of school principals' leadership, leading by cultivating home-bred communities of practice, context-responsive leadership: making policy malleable to respond to local needs, "close surveillance" of teaching and learning: conceptualisation and foresight.

7.2.1 "*Izandla ziyagezana*" as metaphor for Ubuntu practices of school principals' leadership

This African proverb *"Izandla ziyagezana"* (loosely translated to one hand washes the other) encapsulates one of the values of the African philosophy of *Ubuntu*. Literally, one hand cannot wash the back of its palm, it needs another hand to wash the back of its palm. This means

human beings need the assistance and support of others in order to survive which epitomises our interconnectedness and interdependency (Ncube, 2010). As human beings we owe our being to our human interconnectedness and interdependency. *Ubuntu* can then be described as the African philosophy that embraces lending a helping hand to those in need, sympathy, caring, empathy, being sensitive to the plight of others, kind, respectful, compassionate, reciprocal and considerate (Msila, 2008; Nussbaum, 2003). Being indigenous and Afrocentric, *Ubuntu* constitutes the fundamentals of a number of traditional African cultures (Ncube, 2010). What features prominently in *Ubuntu* is how one relates with other people. Practically, *Ubuntu* involves harmonious human co-existence, sense of belonging to a community and give and take in the spirit of collective development of the community. Without expecting anything in return, people with *Ubuntu* deliberately reach out to other fellow human beings in need irrespective of whether they know them or not. All the four participants, Ms Passionate, Mr Communist, Ms Assertive and Ms Elegant, are school leaders with *Ubuntu* as evidenced in their leadership practices. Ms Passionate explicates:

> *My approach is that, I don't change faces, I am professional in all that I do. Though we have to use policy, at this school I have led with my humbleness (Ubuntu). I am humble, I think before I talk to a person. Let me make an example of a teacher who has been absent for days although I don't have that problem that much. The departmental approach is that when he/she comes back you issue them with a leave of absence form. But my approach will be to listen to them regarding what the problem was and check if they understand what the policy is regarding leave. So I listen to a person because I believe that absence may be the tip of an iceberg; when you see the person in front of you at face value you will think that person doesn't have a problem but deeper inside there could be a problem.*

The principal's leadership that is inspired by *Ubuntu* is characterised by, amongst others, being humble, considerate, good interpersonal skills and caring (Venter, 2004). What underlies Ms Passionate's professional interaction with stakeholders is humility. This suggests that she understands that being a school principal does not mean that she is better than other stakeholders in the school community. Therefore, every individual deserves to be respected as a human being. This is what the philosophy of Ubuntu espouses; that no individual is above the collective interests of the group or community. While policy obliges her to issue leave of absence forms to a teacher who has been absent, Ms Passionate affords the teacher a chance to

explain the reason for absence. By being this compassionate and empathetic, which are values of Ubuntu, she refutes the business-like transaction approach of treating the other as object; where if one has been absent she just issues leave of absence forms. She believes in addressing the root cause, not the symptoms. Addressing the root cause is a long term solution.

Ubuntu, as a communal survival mechanism, emanated from socioeconomic and geographic adversities that people contended with and in the face of which people had to join forces in order to survive (Mbigi, 2000). Communalism is one of the fundamental components of Ubuntu (Msila, 2008). The interests of the community take precedence over those of the individual. *Ubuntu* philosophy views survival of the community as a collective endeavour, it is not the survival of the richest or strongest or fittest individual. Mr Communist identifies with the plight of the poor. He puts himself in their shoes by having school policies that are inclusively pro-poor. Such policies effectively constitute a survival strategy of the community. Mr Communist joins hands with the school community to ensure their children survive challenges. He voluntarily moves beyond the call of duty to ensure that poor learners' school needs are taken care of; an initiative which characterises *Ubuntu.* In his own words, Mr Communist elucidated:

> *I'm teaching poor children who come from poor families, I also grew up in a very poor family. When learners go for an excursion they do pay, but the school subsidises their payment because one is conscious of their background. When they go to play soccer, athletics and everything on behalf of the school, they don't pay even a cent; the school pays for everything. We know when children don't have something to wear during winter, I organise something for those learners and make sure that they still get something to wear. I have organised uniforms from the municipality, and from companies that do services in the area. We try by all means to make sure that every learner has shoes especially during winter. Up to now we have pairs of shoes that are waiting for any learner who will not have shoes and uniform, then we take those shoes and give it to the learner. I believe you don't only meet the child in the class so that you teach him/her and he/she goes away. We look at what his or her needs are, then we go out and try to find whatever that kid needs. It's because of my poor background that I was socialised to be conscious of whoever is poor and try to find means to assist whoever is poor regarding what he or she needs; so it helps in that way.*

Making it his mission to understand and empathise with the learner community he leads was the manifestation of servant leadership (Spears, 1998). Being rurally rooted himself, Mr Communist is sensitive to the plight of his learners from poverty-stricken backgrounds. He understands that for these learners being at school and remaining at school is a matter of survival hence the *"izandla ziyagezana*-inspired" means to provide for some of their basic needs. These means may translate into policy provisions or providing the actual needs at school level. How Mr Communist responds to his school's needs mirrors the *Ubuntu* value that individual interests cannot be placed above the interests of the community (Venter, 2004). Therefore, he responds with an Africanised approach to the day-to-day needs of his learners (Setlhodi, 2019). As a member of the community, Mr Communist puts the interests of the community first by alleviating the plight of the community's children, particularly for the common good of the very same community. Furthermore, Mr Communist is being proactive by having "shoe reserves" in anticipation of learners who may need school shoes in the future. Given the above, it appears that the Mr Communist "self" is embedded in the group, the collective.

In practice, *Ubuntu* may embrace actions that individuals or organisations take which reflect being compassionate, responsive to the plight of the community, able to share with and care for others (Nussbaum, 2003). *Ubuntu* and *izandla ziyagezana* actions may be group-driven or individual-driven; with the understanding that individual achievements are subsumed in the achievements of the group with regards to the latter. Ms Elegant understands the landscape of the socioeconomic status of her learners hence the actions that are responsive to their realities. She mobilises the sponsorship of anyone who is willing to mitigate the plight of her learners for the betterment of the community as a whole. By so doing, she causes the needs of the poor learners to become a communal responsibility; not an individual or individual family's responsibility. Providing for the basic needs of her learners, Ms Elegant's actions are characterised and driven by compassion, the need to share and leadership of care. Ms Elegant has this to say:

> *We are in a deep, deep, poor rural area. We have learners from child-headed households. They have to look after their siblings and find food for them. Some are orphans and they live with their grandparents. We've identified these learners and those coming from poor families. We are trying to help them. I reach out to people who may assist them. We have forged a partnership with a local taxi association.*

They sponsor us with school uniforms for those who do not have it. If you can come in the morning you can observe that there is no learner who does not have uniform since I started that programme. I organise sponsored food parcels that these needy children take home. In the afternoon, from the school nutrition programme we also dish up extra so that these children can have their afternoon meals at home. I negotiated with our school nutrition supplier to buy a bit more than the prescribed food rations in order to provide for these poor children.

One of the characteristics of servant leadership is empathy (Spears, 1998). Servant leaders prioritise understanding and empathising with individuals they lead within the organisation (Spears, 1998). Through this *izandla ziyagezana*-inspired programme, Ms Elegant has been instrumental in ensuring that all learners have school uniform irrespective of the family backgrounds. This is the manifestation of empathy. She takes care of indigent learners even beyond the prescribed school hours and beyond the bounds of the school by either organising food parcels or extra meals to take home from the school kitchen. To this end, *Ubuntu* means being conscious of one's innate yearning to uphold humanity of others (Nussbaum, 2003). Ms Elegant's consciousness translates into acts of social justice for those who contend with abject poverty; acts which reflect human interconnectedness.

Leadership that is inspired by Ubuntu embraces the urge to mobilise stakeholders and encourage them to share in the communal responsibilities for the greater good of the society (Setlhodi, 2019). Communal responsibilities include, *inter alia,* being actively involved in the education of the children of the village. In the context of *Ubuntu,* Ms Assertive understands that transformation or development of communities is everyone's responsibility and it begins with ensuring that learners' basic needs at school are taken care of. To Ms Assertive, the essence of being human finds its expression in shouldering communal responsibilities for collective development of the community. Befriending learners so that they find it easy to open up about their challenges shows Ubuntu's absolute respect for others' basic humanity (Ncube, 2010). This mirrors humility and the understanding that no one is more important than other people irrespective of backgrounds. Given this leadership practice, Ms Assertive appears to refute individuality, she subscribes to collective solidarity. It is in this vein that school principals translate their understandings of school contexts into leadership practices that enable and invoke community agency to exploit opportunities in the wake of adversities (Sallee &

Boske, 2013). Without such translation the status quo in Ms Assertive's school, in terms of learners' basic needs, would have prevailed. In her own words, Ms Assertive expounds:

> *Before I am a principal I am a teacher. As a teacher, I have to be friends with my learners so that they can come out and tell me about their problems. Some of them are poverty-stricken. In some cases you find that parents died or for some reasons parents left their children with very old gogos (grannies) and some learners live all by themselves. As the principal, I go all the way out to get the sponsors to help these children. There is an NGO in the community that has given us uniforms. There is a company from Pietermaritzburg that I work hand in hand with, they have also sponsored us with uniforms. Therefore, if learners cannot afford to buy the uniform, I go all the way to make sure I get sponsors. You won't believe, at my school I've got maybe 4 card boxes of shoes right now for learners. If we see a learner wearing torn shoes or old shoes, we give that learner a pair of shoes if the size is there. Those shoes were donated, it's not that they are from the school's money. There are very few learners who do not wear school uniform.*

Evidently, the varying landscape of school contexts has an influence on the leadership practices of school principals (Hallinger, 2016). The practices of all participants are reflective of the essence of the meaning of the African proverb "*izandla ziyagezana*"; one of the cornerstones of *Ubuntu*. They go beyond the confines of their job description in the quest to provide for the basic needs of their fellow human beings; their learners and the school community. Leadership that is premised within Ubuntu encourages development of the ethos of inclusivity in the schools (Msila, 2008). Ameliorating the plight of indigent learners, these school principals promote the principle of inclusiveness regardless of socioeconomic status or family background. Having the indigent learners' basic needs taken care of may sustain their regular attendance and enhance their academic performance. Consequently, this may culminate in improved overall school performance and school effectiveness which may ultimately enhance the socioeconomic status of the community at large. Further, in the spirit of *izandla ziyagezana* which is *Ubuntu*, the school principals consciously allow the communal interests to take precedence over their individual interests (Ncube, 2010). To this end, they consider *izandla ziyagezana*-inspired communal achievement as more important than the achievement of each individual within the community.

7.2.2 Leading by cultivating home-bred communities of practice

A community of people who recurrently share and develop their common interests, which amongst others include, their professional knowledge, experiences and expertise in a particular field through constant interaction with one another with the aim of learning collaboratively and from one another is referred to as a community of practice (Wenger, McDermott & Snyder, 2002). In the realm of educational practice, groups of teachers who work together regularly to reflect on their common professional interests to achieve growth to the benefit of learners becomes the communities of practice (COPs). This effectively responds to the reality that due to the ever-changing nature of educational practice, teacher learning should be perpetual if teachers are to remain relevant to classroom practice (Grosemans, Boon, Verclairen ,Dochy & Kyndt, 2015). It is to this end that learning together inside the schools takes place in "home-bred" COPs. These are home-bred COPs because they are school-brewed, they are a vehicle through which professional capital is shared, they do not involve other teachers beyond the bounds of their schools and neither do they involve external experts. Ms Passionate, Mr Communist, Ms Assertive and Ms Elegant are leading "home-bred" COPs in their schools which are based on the notion of indwelling (Polanyi, 1962). Within their schools, they create and utilise platforms for the sharing of field-specific knowledge capital and equally, like every teacher in the school, they also become contributing members of such platforms. This notion of indwelling embraces trans-individual teacher process of professional learning and thinking collectively (Pyrko, Dorfler & Eden, 2017). When the indwelling of teachers is intertwined and aligned, they can configure and reconfigure the meanings of their social practice within their schools (Pyrko, Dorfler & Eden, 2017). By so doing, the home-bred COPs seek to trigger and sustain school discourses that negotiate the day-to-day realities unique to their schools. Ms Passionate had this to share:

> *I develop my teachers. If you can read my minutes of staff meetings, it's development all the way. The learners of this school, need well-equipped teachers. I develop both old and new teachers because it's human that a person forgets and a person will do something wrong and say I have forgotten. Induction is for everyone because I have to teach new teachers how we do things here at school and I have to remind old teachers how we do things here at school. I again develop them when it comes to teaching and learning. When they start, I develop them on what classroom management is. At the beginning of the year, I workshop my own*

teachers on chalkboard handwriting. We are two, we have the same handwriting. My colleague takes foundation phase teachers and I deploy myself to intermediate phase teachers. I like this one, it's near my heart. I workshop them to write on lines on the chalkboard. In return, they teach these kids until they can do the same. By looking at the chalkboard handwriting you can identify a teacher who is from this school. I go to class to check the teachers' chalkboard writing.

To Ms Passionate, the home-bred COP has become the lifeblood of her school. To ensure that all the teachers are constantly "singing from the same hymnbook" regarding the direction the school's core business takes during each academic year, she tailor-makes the activities of the COP to cater for both the newly appointed and experienced teachers. Ms Passionate attends to somewhat finer professional details to make certain that all teachers "sing in unison." She models to teachers on how to improvise. She teaches them how to write professionally on the chalkboard and how to draw permanent lines on the chalkboard using sugar-water solution and chalk. Directly or indirectly, this assists the learners to enhance their handwriting. Ms Passionate announces: *"I have told the HOD that we will be here tomorrow. We are going to melt chalk in water with sugar and use that to draw permanent lines on the chalkboard."* Given the above, evidently Ms Passionate considers the home-bred COP as the vehicle through which all teachers at her school are professionally empowered and updated.

Underpinning COPs are three chief principles: mutual engagement, a joint enterprise and a common repertoire (Wenger, 1998). Mutual engagement, in the case of teachers, refers to professional interactive dialogues. A joint enterprise refers to negotiation and re-negotiation of meanings regarding matters of common professional interests. Lastly, a common repertoire involves shared teaching practices, methodologies, professional language and opinions and vital documents (Wenger, 1998). Professional dialoguing of teachers in a school creates local ownership of professional capital which culminates in a collection of shared meanings and practices. The homegrown platforms for professional dialogues become the home-bred COP. In her own words, Ms Assertive explicates:

Other than the workshops facilitated by different stakeholders including the Ilembe District of Education. I also workshop my teachers. This picture [on the collage] represents workshops I organise for my colleagues within the school. It is through these workshops that I make sure we develop each other professionally. I workshop

them on different issues including curriculum, IQMS, assessment, early childhood development. I have even workshopped them on how to become the best teacher and how to behave professionally within the community we are serving. That is why I said growth is important, we must grow as teachers and leaders. I also workshop my HODs on how to monitor teachers' work. This is about helping each and everyone in the school because it does not help to shine alone, you have to shine with others.

This home-bred COP becomes a critical platform for the generation and sharing of specific professional capital (Hasmath & Hsu, 2016). The school principal and the teachers work jointly to negotiate and re-negotiate meanings of their common repertoire (Wenger, 1998). It is through this negotiation and re-negotiation of meanings that professional learning and growth take place within the school with the mutual intention of improving learner academic performance (Bolam, Stoll, Thomas & Wallace, 2005). Ms Assertive understands that "collective" professional growth is crucial as it does not benefit the school if growth is fragmented and not a collaboration phenomenon. Only the home-bred COPs are able to articulate the shared repertoire that may be unique to a school; which the external agencies including the Department of Education cannot venture into or access.

How COPs are configured in practice varies from context to context. Some are formally constituted and even funded while others are absolutely informally founded and not even visible (Wenger & Wenger-Trayner, 2015). Whether formally or informally established, COPs perform multi-pronged purposes involving teacher learning, augmented teaching and learning, championing school development and enhanced research outputs regarding classroom practice (MacPhail, Patton, Parker & Tannehill, 2014). The home-bred COPs including one in Mr Communist's school may not be formally recognised and to other people, not even visible however, it promotes the sense of communal professional learning and shared practices. Mr Communist is proactive in his approach, in some cases he tailor-makes meetings to accommodate developmental needs of the school and in other cases he identifies an area of development and addresses it. The in-house collective professional engagements and sharing of professional capital enable the teachers to navigate their unique school actualities and avoid remaining professionally isolated, stagnant and irrelevant. This becomes a direct, custom-made response to the challenge posed by the episodic nature (one-shot workshops) (Lumpe, 2007)

of the Department of Education-initiated COPs which may not respond to unique day-to-day operational realities of individual schools. Mr Communist had this to share:

> *There is quite a lot that I do to develop my teachers. Our meetings are purposeful, we have a developmental area to address in each meeting so that teachers gain something from that meeting. But on top of that I have organised sessions to address areas where I see that teachers are lacking knowledge. I've developed them on labour issues, section 17 and 18 of the Employment of Educators' Act, because I've picked up that some of them are, amongst others, still using corporal punishment. I did that so that they know that some of the things that they do are transgressions in terms of departmental laws and what could happen to an educator who is found to have transgressed the policies. We've also done grievance procedures which are found on the PAM document. They used to report each other anyhow and expect somebody to take action. So I had to take them step by step regarding how you lodge a grievance.*

These home-bred COPs are consciously conceptualised, introspectively deployed to address real-life issues that schools in rural contexts contend with (Parker, Patton, Madden & Sinclair, 2010). Mr Communist educates his teachers on budgetary issues so that there is transparency regarding the financial state of the school and everyone understands the importance of making a budget and sticking to it. This is critical given the general inadequacy of public school allocations particularly since these participant schools are quintile 1, no fee paying schools. Further, Mr Communist is not reactive. When he witnesses one teacher who has "derailed" in terms of policy provisions, he does not wait for others to follow suit before he acts. He uses the school's home-bred COP channels swiftly to articulate policy position to all the teachers in the school. Mr Communist added that:

> *I've also taken my teachers through on budgeting because each department or committee needs to budget for the programmes that they need to implement for the following year. We've got committees at school, there is cultural committee, music committee, sports committee and so on. They have to budget because they cannot just come in July and tell me that they want soccer and netball kits which are not in the budget because the money that we are using is not ours. So I do workshops when I pick up that there is something that the teachers need to know. I don't just*

workshop the one who has made a mistake, I just call all of them and give them that mini workshop so that all of them can be on the same page.

These home-bred COPs appear to occupy the vacuum, unique to each school, where traditional episodic ways of professional learning cannot venture into. These home-bred COPs are perceived to enable teachers to generate their own professional learning content contrary to being instructed by "experts" from beyond the bounds of the school (Vangrieken, Meredith, Packer & Kyndt, 2016). Traditionally, the latter (instruction by outside experts) in the main, takes a "one cap fits all schools" approach. This approach leaves a "vacuum" which it fails to fill; such a vacuum is the unique contexts of individual schools. The "vacuum", which becomes the lack of school context-specific continuous teacher development, emerges during the period between the generally one-shot workshops that are, in my view, a "one cap fits everyone" and the next ones. The principal and the teachers are foot soldiers who understand their "vacuum", their day-to-day realities, which they constantly address through home-bred COPs. Left unaddressed or unfilled, this "vacuum" may breed professional isolation and gaps to the detriment of school improvement.

Enactment of membership of the "home-bred" COPs is activated through ongoing interactive professional dialogues, shared practice and collective school realities (Iverson, 2011). Teachers may not necessarily be conscious of their home-bred COP membership. However, due to contending with a common set of professional actualities, teachers do experience a sense of collective identity and collective professional learning as they rally themselves around negotiated and renegotiated practice that all teachers in a school associate with (Wenger, 1998). Ms Elegant does not hog the platform of the home-bred COP. She affords all teachers equally an opportunity to use the platform to share professional capital with all colleagues, particularly that which can benefit the entire school. Her teachers may not be aware that they are members of the home-bred COP. Nonetheless, by virtue of participating in reciprocated professional dialogues, sharing of common practice and negotiating collective professional interests their membership is active. Ms Elegant elucidates briefly:

We work jointly with my teachers. I develop them on professional issues from time to time, I take them step by step. I have an open door policy. Whoever has information relevant and beneficial to teaching and learning is free to approach my office and share that information. Together with the School Management Team

(SMT), we consider that information. If it's beneficial to the school I afford that teacher or teachers a chance to present it to their colleagues so that collectively we discuss how it can be effectively implemented. I'm not jack of all trades, I go all out to find out information regarding professional issues the school contends with; which I then discuss with the SMT to consider how it can be shared in a way that benefits the school. So I also make it a point that teachers who attend departmental workshops on their return they must workshop all of us in the school.

One of the core leadership practices is restructuring the organisation (Leithwood, 2007). School principals restructure their schools as COPs which involves, *inter alia*, transformation of existing structures, augmenting professional discourse and forging cooperation between the school and the parents (Leithwood, 2007). Articulating feedback on departmental workshop to all teachers in the school through home-bred COP may afford the school to re-negotiate meanings and practices so that they are customised for their school context. Servant leaders are committed to the growth of the people they lead (Spears, 1998), hence the COPs that provided professional growth to all the teachers. Evidently, Ms Elegant attaches great value to home-bred COP as she also gives audience to all teachers who report back to the entire school after these externally organised workshops. Furthermore, the principal, Ms Elegant, proactively conducts research on some identified developmental areas and thereafter shares it with the school. Consequently, these home-bred COPs seek to collapse the bulwarks of solitary professional practice (Byrk, 2016). They build platforms on which teachers learn from one another and with one another thereby encouraging shared growth in professional expertise (Hadar & Brody, 2010). While in some quarters teaching may be considered to be a "privatised" practice, occurring behind the classroom walls, the in-house COPs "de-privatise" the classroom space through shared repertoire. To this end, what is considered traditionally to be a solo practice becomes communal practice which is or can be configured to context-specifications. Further, home-bred COPs are not haphazard or random communities (Patton & Parker, 2017) even if they may be informal. If these home-bred COPs are configured into or degenerate into random groups, they may defeat the ends of their benefits in different school contexts and may be relegated into dysfunctionality.

7.2.3 Context-responsive leadership: Making policy malleable to respond to local needs

Constituting school contexts are internal and external forces. School context embraces, *inter alia*, structural and cultural facets of a school, family backgrounds of learners enrolled at a school or community background within which a school is located, resource capacities, geographic positioning of schools and the impact of external forces like departmental policies or stakeholders (Noman, Hashim & Abdullah, 2016). These are the forces which the principals need to respond to with the intention of influencing them to the advantage of their schools (Noman, Hashim & Abdullah, 2016). This suggests that even if schools are located within the same area, leadership practices that school principals enact may not necessarily be homogenous. This means that leadership practices of school principals may not be divorced from the context in which they play out. It is to this end that it becomes crucial for the school principals to overhaul and translate their understandings of their school contexts into leadership practices enablers that petition the agency of stakeholder community to exploit opportunities in the wake of adversities (Sallee & Boske, 2013). Detaching the leadership practices from the context may defeat their own ends thereby, amongst others, being complicit in maintaining the status quo or causing the school to degenerate into irrelevance. By observing the general concerns of their secondary school counterparts in the area regarding ill-competent learners in the language of teaching and learning, Ms Assertive, Mr Communist, Ms Passionate and Ms Elegant started the English programmes that sought to equip their learners with language competency commensurate with their post-primary school demands. By so doing, these school principals were responding to their unique contextual practicalities. Consequently, these English programmes essentially became the home-concocted response to the language competency challenge that learners contended with. Further, such leadership practice is typically context-embedded. This practice characterises servant leadership. These school principals have foresight that enables them to foresee the possible outcomes or impacts of a set of past and current realities that their schools contend with (Spears, 1998). Foresight cannot be divorced from context. From the horse's mouth, Ms Passionate had this to say:

> *There is this English Speech Programme that we are engaged in. There are different categories including storytelling, reading, speeches, debates, dramatisation, role-modelling and poetry. There was a general outcry in the secondary schools that we are feeding; that matriculants may know the answers but they do not understand the questions during exams. So I teach them English.*

> *That was my vision. I engaged my school in the English Speech Programme. Competition starts at school level after which it goes to a seven-school cluster level. Thereafter, winners proceed to circuit and district levels. At grade four learners are to compose poems which we edit for them. That's what they do in the morning before they engage with the lessons for the day. We are encouraging learners to speak English and everyone who has participated gets a certificate. As you see around this office, we have got so many trophies, those trophies are for the English Speech Programme which they won at district level.*

This context-responsive programme typically addresses the day to day classroom realities of their learners beyond primary school. This may potentially enhance both current and future learning experiences of learners. Based on the accolades the school has received, it appears the school principal is effectively leading and managing the English Speech Programme and it is achieving its own ends. This programme epitomises what Makhasane, Simamane and Chikoko (2018) refer to as thinking beyond the confines of a policy box. Ms Passionate defied the prescriptively confined policy space, instead she ventured beyond the bounds of prescription to mitigate domestic challenges. In her own words, she emphasised: *"That's why at the University of KwaZulu-Natal principals' leadership seminar I once said I think outside the box."* Despite the policy framework that does not sanction the use of English as a language of teaching and learning in the foundation phase, Ms Passionate introduced English from grade R. Ms Passionate argued:

> *My argument was why are we teaching you in isiZulu if we want to assist secondary schools to get products (learners) that are competent in the language of instruction (English)? I said to grade 1 that I am going to communicate with you in English though the policy is saying that we must teach you in IsiZulu.*

Furthermore, investing on enhancing the competency of learners in the language of teaching and learning has paid and is paying dividends based on the feedback that Ms Passionate has received. Ms Passionate shared the following: *"Learners who are already in secondary schools told me that they have presented speeches and their teachers were impressed and commended our Work Primary School for being a good school."* Feedback from one of the schools that is perceived to provide quality education also attested to the claims that were made by the ex-learners. Ms Passionate added:

A HOD from one primary school called to say our learners flaunt their competency in English, my learners even outclass their learners and to ask how we did it. That's when I realised that I am working effectively because I know their standard is high.

Juxtaposing the departmental policy regarding non-use of English as a language of instruction in the foundation phase and the home-concocted response regarding the same; it appears, on the one hand, that the former defies the potential impact of the epistemologies of context. On the other hand, the birth of the latter mirrors the critical alignment between policy and context; a recipe for the enactment of context-effective practices. It is in this vein that in the context of multiple deprivation, the transformation agenda can be driven by immediate practicalities instead of relying on policy provisions (Myende & Bhengu, 2016) which are a "one size fits all" and in some cases, detached from context.

As one of the core leadership practices, managing teaching and learning processes embraces hiring professionals aligned to school vision, offering support to teaching and learning activities and monitoring all facets of school life (Leithwood, 2007). School principals need to provide a sound support framework to ensure teachers remain focused on the school's core business of teaching and learning. In support of the school instructional programmes, Ms Assertive pioneered a language programme; then other schools followed suit. The English Speech Contest sought to enable her learners to comprehend the language of teaching and learning (English) thereby potentially augment the understanding of different subjects. This was because learners' lack of proficiency in English was perceived to account for the high failure rate in matric in the neighbouring secondary counterparts. Ms Assertive explained:

The activity that I cannot stop mentioning is the English Speech Contest. We had a problem, our neighbouring high school was failing a lot in grade 12. They would say learners from primary schools are not proficient in the language of instruction. So we decided to introduce the English Speech Contest which now involves our whole cluster but it started with our school. We encourage learners to practice speaking English because we believe that if they can speak it, it is easy to write. So we arrange English activities in every morning assembly. We've got a schedule. These activities involve poems, storytelling, news reading, debates and dialogues. We compete amongst ourselves within the school and at different levels. In the Junior Land Care Competition our learners obtained position one in the debate

and speech category at district level. At provincial level, we obtained position one in speech and three in debate. This means this English programme is making some difference for us, it's really working for the school.

Being able to contest at provincial levels with other schools means that Ms Assertive is reaping the rewards of an intervention that responds to local needs which challenges the "same cap fits all" policy prescriptions regarding the medium of instruction in the foundation phase. She submits that the programme is turning the learners' language competency trajectory around. Similarly, Ms Assertive argues that sometimes policymakers formulate policies which indicate that they are not privy to diversified school contexts. She avers that having been taught in IsiZulu in the foundation phase, grade fours are unable to construct sentences in English. Given that challenge, it is not possible for them to understand questions and write the correct spelling. Based on this, instead of helplessly pointing fingers at the department they proactively took charge of their domestic affair. In her own words, Ms Assertive contended:

Sometimes the department makes laws indicating that they do not know our schools. I'm still arguing even today against the policy that we must teach foundation phase in IsiZulu. When they come to grade four they are not able to construct even a single sentence in English, they will not be able to understand questions. How then are they going to answer questions if they do not understand? Let alone spelling. We decided to do something because we cannot be sitting and complaining about the government while we are the people facing the challenge at grassroots.

Ms Assertive refused to be "policy-boxed" instead she proactively ventured beyond the "box" in the quest to find a practical alternative to a local problem. Given a myriad of adversities prevalent in schools located in rural contexts in South Africa, it is argued, the quality of learning experiences of learners need to be enhanced (Mohangi, Krog, Stephens & Nel, 2016). Ms Assertive "unboxes" her thinking with the intention of raising the English competency bar of her learners so that they could cope with the demands of their academics, in the main and be able to compete with their counterparts in other schools.

In some instances, rural principals may not have a choice but to enact policies selectively based on what characterises their schools (Miller, 2015). Such selective enactment constitutes a "policy filter" that seeks to avoid policies that are disengaged from unique school reality. To

this end, school principals are often policy benders who are inclined to change in response to their immediate school actualities (Riley, 2000). Sometimes violating the policy provisions becomes the only lifeline the school principals can throw to save the day for their day to day encounters with classroom realities. For the successful school principals, such a lifeline is the manner in which they customise their response to their distinct context specifications with the intention of maximising the performance of their schools (Gurr, 2014). Wholesale enactment of policies without due regard of the unique nature of school character may have inadvertent consequences which may derail the vision of the school.

Ms Elegant consciously filters policy prescriptions in order to screen out irrelevant elements which she replaces with home-architected strategies. In defying the impact of the policy provisions that do not advance the interests of learners in terms of competency in English, she custom-makes an intervention in the form of an English programme. Ms Elegant stood up to the authorities who insisted that in foundation phase teaching should be in IsiZulu. She told them that as the school principal she believed that it was not impossible to teach those learners in English. She noted that parents were happy and they endorsed her locally-brewed programme. The following, are the details as Ms Elegant recounted:

> *Our main focus is English because our learners' home language is IsiZulu. We decided to refine their English language skills because even at tertiary and everywhere they need to express themselves in English. Teaching the foundation phase in IsiZulu does not work for us. We fought a lot with foundation phase subject advisors who told us that this phase must be taught in their home language. I told them that as a school principal I believed teaching our foundation phase learners English was a possibility and they enjoyed it. Even at grade R level they are taught in English. If you go to grade R learners will greet you in English. You have reminded me that this time we are hosting the cluster English competition which, amongst others, involves poetry, drama, speech and reading. It involves grade R to seven. Even parents commend us for taking such a decision. All parents want their children to speak English.*

Even though her "defiance stunt" could have put her job on the line, Ms Elegant remained unshaken in her strong belief that the English programme spoke directly to their domestic affairs. By so doing, she set the direction the school was taking. Setting direction is one of the

core leadership practices that involves the principals articulating a shared vision to the stakeholder community and setting high but achievable expectations for themselves, learners and teachers (Leithwood, 2007). The decision to use English became the shared vision amongst stakeholders since parents shared the same sentiments regarding their children's early exposure to English despite the official position of the department. In addition, while some schools do not have a structured remedial programme, Ms Elegant has a structured remedial work programme for struggling learners. In charge of remedial work is the remedial work committee captained by a chairperson. Learners in grade three or four who are lagging behind in terms of phonics are sent to a grade one teacher for catch up programmes. On the composite school timetable there are periods designated for remedial work. Ms Elegant elaborated:

> *We do have a programme for failing learners. We have a committee, led by its own chair, which is responsible for remedial work. Learners from grade three to four who have not mastered phonics are sent to a grade one teacher to assist them. The same applies to Mathematics. We even have periods dedicated to remedial work on our timetable including grades four to seven.*

Attesting to Ms Elegant's commitment to practices that respond to their distinct domestic challenges is the support framework she created to assist learners to cope with some language skills and other subjects. Such practices could enhance the teaching and learning experiences of both teachers and learners respectively thereby creating a fertile terrain for improving academic performance.

Successful principals understand that for their leadership practices to be effective they need to adapt them commensurate with the context in which their schools operate (Hallinger, 2016; Klar, Brewer & Whitehouse, 2013). Therefore, it takes complexity to defeat complexity (Uhl-Bien, Marion & McKelvey, 2007). Evidently, if school principals choose to turn a blind eye to the influence of context to their day to day operations, they are effectively setting themselves up for failure. Leadership practices that principals enact need to be equal to the task at hand. This suggests that leading and managing a school cannot only and always be about religiously implementing the departmental policies, it should go beyond being mere implementing agents to creative and critical interpretation of policy prescripts *vis-à-vis* context. Mr Communist did not allow his leadership to be relegated to an implementing agent hence the English programme. This programme was the complexity he introduced to defeat the prevalent

complexity of lack of requisite competency in English in learners that progressed to secondary schools. Mr Communist had this to say:

> *We have activities that we do to support the curriculum like the English Speech Programme. We compete in spelling, dramatisation, reading, dialogue, storytelling and debates. The aim is to assist learners to develop language proficiency at an early age so that learners are able to express themselves in English. Nationally, African children are not doing well because they don't have a good command of English; they do not understand the questions which are set in English. This programme has assisted us a lot in improving English of our learners. We start competing from cluster to circuit level. On top of that, we write a cluster-set English common paper.*

Even if schools are located in the same locale it does translate into homogenous school contexts for them. Schools within the same circuit jurisdiction may deal with a diverse nature of operational realities (Noman, Hashim & Abdullah, 2016). Similarly, even though schools are found in rural contexts, it does not necessarily mean that the actualities they contend with are the same. Presuming that challenges within and between countries or within and between schools are identical is a rebuttable presumption (Bush & Middlewood, 2013). Enacting similar leadership practices in some cases need not be construed as those principals having the same rationale for such enactment. In this instance, some participants introduced the English programme because of the common outcry of their neighbouring secondary counterparts while Mr Communist observed the national trends regarding challenges of African learners. In the context of the foregoing discussion, it is crucial to underscore the interplay between leadership and the context within which it plays out. For if leadership context is ignored or relegated to the periphery, our understandings of successful school leadership may continue to be constrained or narrowed (Hallinger, 2016). Thus, it would make sense to contextualise school leadership discourse and subsequently, the quest to configure how findings on effective leadership of schools can be applied in different schools and their unique contexts.

7.2.4 "Close surveillance" of teaching and learning: Conceptualisation and foresight

Effective monitoring of teachers and teaching and learning processes by the School Management Teams (SMTs) or the school principals is a crucial process embracing identification, evaluation and enhancement of the performance of teachers in the quest to

achieve the school vision and ultimately deliver quality education (Dammas & Alharthy, 2019). Consequently, it has been progressively acknowledged that surveillance of the core business of the school (teaching and learning) is one of the most critical responsibilities of the SMTs and the school principals (Alkadri, 2019; Bush, Jourbert, Kiggundu & van Rooyen, 2010; Lucky & Ogechi, 2019). This indicates that one way of achieving quality education is to put teaching and learning under close surveillance using the lenses of conceptualisation, foresight and stewardship. Conceptualisation, foresight and stewardship are essential constructs of servant leadership (Spears, 1998) (Refer to 3.3.1.6, 3.3.1.7 and 3.3.1.8 in Chapter Three). Conceptualisation about their school actualities demands that the principals have the foresight. Being able to conceptualise and have foresight but without a sense of stewardship may be futile. Using surveillance tools, Ms Passionate, Mr Communist, Ms Assertive and Ms Elegant closely watched the unfolding of teaching and learning processes in their schools. The core business of their schools was subjected to close surveillance driven by conceptualisation, foresight and stewardship. Keeping a close eye on teaching and learning involves formulation of goals, evaluation, analysis and forecasting of actualities the school currently contends with or will contend with in the future. These activities are characterised by conceptualisation, foresight and stewardship (Spears, 1998). These participant school principals understood that it was important to know exactly the subject of their surveillance operations hence the introduction and use of monitoring tools. Ms Passionate explicated:

> *I am always at school if I'm not at a meeting because my main focus is on teaching and learning. I monitor, control and evaluate teachers' and learners' work to ensure that we are on par regarding what is expected, especially for the learner. I have a monitoring plan which I, together with the teachers and HODs, drew up the previous year. I give everyone my monitoring schedule and tell them what I will be looking for and the number of learners' exercise books I need. It's all written in the curriculum planning. But when I come for the second or third time, I collect the exercise books myself randomly. There are also unannounced visits where I do not announce the dates. You will find me in your classroom. This year I am also checking the lesson plans and endorse them before I send them to the HODs. I tick on the monitoring tool for lesson plans. If I find a class without a teacher, I go and look for the teacher. While the HOD moderates questions, I check the assessment files quarterly.*

Manifestly, regarding her curriculum monitoring plan, Ms Passionate subscribes to the principle of transparency. Effective surveillance of teaching and learning is a point of departure of transparency. Thus, the absence of transparency breeds adverse effects on the school improvement trajectory (Darmawan, 2019). Such adverse effects may include erosion of trust, amongst others. In this case, Ms Passionate's supervisees know what is to be monitored and when it is to be monitored. Clearly, monitoring was to be understood as a component of the school's shared vision. Most importantly, this suggests that though she puts teaching and learning activities under close surveillance, it does not become a fault finding expedition. Monitoring operations remain a support framework that standardises the quality of the core business of the school. This close surveillance of school operations is augmented by that she is mostly visible at school and she appears to be hands on. To this end, the ground has shifted from principalship that was managerial in nature to principalship that understands the importance of crafting a shared vision, implementation and evaluation of the curriculum and context-responsive transformation (Rintoul & Bishop, 2019). Given her hands on role on tool-driven monitoring, Ms Passionate has shifted to new ground regarding curriculum surveillance related activities.

Being able to appreciate the importance of close surveillance and correspondingly engage in practices that seek to operationalise such, needs school principals to have foresight. Foresight is not ordinary or baseless speculation but it characterises "the lead" that school principals have (Greenleaf, 1991). Close surveillance involves constantly considering and evaluating the prevalent set of circumstances, regarding schools' core business, against the backdrop of the previous set of forecasts while in a similar vein crafting future projections (Spears, 1998). This fundamentally constitutes foresight. It is typically "the lead" that Ms Assertive possess with regard to surveillance of teaching and learning operations. Issues and data arising from monitoring of school operations could be addressed in the home-bred communities of practice since these seek to address the actualities peculiar to each school. Ms Assertive shared the following:

> *I make sure that every teacher is at school, teaching. I check both teachers' and learners' work. I don't check teachers' lesson plans every day but the HOD does. HODs submit lesson plans to me. I check teachers' files at any time. We have announced and unannounced days for submission of files. We also have announced and unannounced class visits. I believe the more the teacher knows what they are*

going to do in class, the better learners shall perform. I've got surveillance tools I use in my school. Then there is this tool which I like the most called the monthly monitoring tool which we use. The HODs complete it in terms of teaching and learning activities in a given month. It is submitted to me at the end of the month. From that tool I am able to identify a teacher who is not doing what they are supposed to do, for example, non-submission of lesson plans, unmarked learners' exercise books or insufficient homework. I then conduct an unannounced class visit to the teacher I have identified to be not complying. As a school principal, I believe that I must not leave everything to the HODs. Though they are curriculum specialists, I still have to help them. Last year before we closed, we all sat together and helped one another to prepare our files for this year. HODs came with all the required documents.

The preceding narrative suggests that it is through close surveillance of teaching and learning that visionary school principals are able to assist their teachers in augmenting their teaching methodologies and learning experiences of their learners (Dammas & Alharthy, 2019). In this instance, other than routine check of lesson preparations, Ms Assertive tracks down the curriculum delivery progress on a monthly basis and swiftly takes corresponding action based on collated data through the tool. To maximise the potential of teachers in teaching and learning, school principals need to relentlessly monitor the teachers (Lucky & Ogechi, 2019). Such action needs foresight and stewardship with emphasis on development. Hence she performs her oversight role without disempowering or usurping the jurisdiction of the HODs. Instead, Ms Assertive understands that it is crucial that she meaningfully supports the HODs. Preparing files together for the forthcoming year constitutes close surveillance characterised by collective professional support and the spirit of teamwork. Furthermore, as a strategy, amongst others, for ensuring that curriculum coverage is not compromised; teachers have to set their quarterly assessments at the beginning of each term. Once set and moderated, Ms Assertive keeps the assessments in the school strong room. This means teachers need to ensure that every aspect of the curriculum is covered because once assessments are approved they may not be changed. Such a strategy entrenches the culture of intimate surveillance. Regarding this strategy, Ms Assertive illuminated:

During the first two weeks I ask for the assessments for the term. You set your assessments before you start teaching. This commits everyone to teaching and

learning. It helps because no one lags behind in class since the paper you have set is not going to change. Teachers submit their assessments to HODs and HODs submit to me. Same thing applies to me, my HOD is my principal when it comes to the curriculum. After the HODs have checked the assessments, they then give them to me and I lock them up in the strong room.

Ms Assertive deploys a multi-pronged, multi-layered strategy to monitoring the school's core business. It is conducted at the HOD level, at the office of the principal level and at the level of the collective in the presence of the principal, where teachers support one another regarding planning tasks. This may constantly "conscientise" the teachers about the importance of effective curriculum delivery and coverage. Moreover, the principal does not consider herself to be above policy, she also submits to the school policy provisions. This was best captured when Ms Assertive announced: *"And I strongly believe in leading by example. I make sure I am the first one who practices the gospel I preach."* This characterises group solidarity and togetherness; one of the core values of *Ubuntu* philosophy (Kamwangalu, 1999). Ms Assertive is the change she wants to see in her school. Such a posture manifests conceptualisation, a clear foresight and consistent stewardship.

Fundamentally underpinning stewardship is service and servanthood (Russell & Stone, 2002). Stewardship embraces being bestowed with custodianship of what is invaluable (De Pree, 1989). In this instance, the principal is the custodian of public education at school level. Echoed by Block (1993), De Pree (1989) postulates that the principal being prepared to be accountable for the well-being of the school community through becoming a servant of those served (teachers, parents and learners) is stewardship. Being a servant steward involves willingness of the principals to develop and support the people they lead to maximise their potential, in this case, in the line of execution of their teaching and learning responsibilities. Understanding what leading to serve means and the scope of her custodianship, Ms Elegant believes in closely watching the unfolding of teaching and learning processes. It is through such close surveillance that her support and professional development initiatives may be effective and meaningful. Ms Elegant expounded:

Using monitoring tools in monitoring teaching and learning is a method I observed from one of my previous schools. Then, when I started here I decided to design monitoring tools for the HODs, deputy principal and myself. HODs monitor

teachers' work, deputy principal checks HODs' work and I monitor deputy principal's work. HODs have different tools that speak to teachers' files, learners' exercise books, workbooks and class registers respectively. Thereafter, the HODs submit their files together with all the monitoring records of the teachers they supervise, to the deputy principal. The deputy principal then scrutinises the files and records of monitoring to check if the HODs and the teachers are on track and what the HODs have done regarding issues revealed by their monitoring. The deputy principal submits their files and the monitoring records of all teachers to me. I also use my own tool to monitor their work. I then ask the deputy principal to make follow up with the HODs regarding unresolved issues and report back to me. I keep records. I don't deal directly with teachers unless it's beyond the control of the HODs. All this is close monitoring. Without monitoring, quality cannot be achieved; it could only be quantity. It is close monitoring that gives us the quality we have.

Designing of surveillance tools reflects that Ms Elegant was proactive. These tools are focused and target-orientated. This suggests that everyone understands exactly what aspects of teaching and learning are being monitored. During the process records of monitoring are kept and used for follow up monitoring. In this vein, Ms Elegant attributes the quality that prevails in her school to close surveillance of academic operations. It is therefore critical to deploy an appropriate approach to monitoring; one that responds to the prevalent school actualities and those of individual teachers (Alkadri, 2019). It may defeat the ends of close surveillance if it is de-contextualised. Cautiously so, Ms Elegant does not infringe on the scope of jurisdiction of the deputy principal and the HODs unless it is supportive intervention. However, she expects them to lead by example and be always up to date regarding curriculum monitoring hence she does not announce in advance the date on which her SMT colleagues should submit their files. Once files are checked, Ms Elegant writes feedback regarding issues that need to be addressed which she calls "love letter". Leading curriculum delivery has now embraced a dynamic working relationship between the school principals and their teachers in the interests of enhancing learner academic achievement (Rintoul & Bishop, 2019). Ultimately, this close monitoring may improve the learning experiences in the quest to raise the graph in terms of results. Ms Elegant had this to announce:

As a leader, you lead by example. With them, because they are SMT I do not tell them the submission dates for files in advance. I just tell them that today and tomorrow I would like to see your files. After checking I write a love letter stating what I found and what I did not find as per the tool used.

Moreover, to ascertain a comprehensive picture regarding how the school fares academically and where the challenges are, Ms Elegant analyses the results quarterly. Informed by this analysis, she organises one on one meetings with individual teachers to find out what their challenges are in the subjects that did not fare well. Without imposing, Ms Elegant allows the teacher to contribute to the solutions. Given this, Ms Elegant understands that by virtue of being the school principal she has been given educational custody of the teachers and learners she leads so that she could assist them to become the best they could be (Sendjaya & Sarros, 2002). This epitomises foresight and stewardship. If schools are to realise their vision and mission regarding their core business, then it may no longer be discretionary for the school principals to devise strategic close surveillance systems (Lucky & Ogechi, 2019). Analysis and subsequent individual counselling are part of internal strategic interventions. Regarding analysis of results and mentoring meetings, Ms Elegant had this to say:

We consider previous analysis of results when we do planning. However, for this quarter I still need to sit down, finalise the analysis and check what went wrong in each grade or subject. I have one on one meetings with subject teachers to check what their challenges are and check if they have solutions for their challenges. I do not want to jump into conclusions, I want the teachers to be the ones who suggest solutions to their challenges so that they do not accuse me of imposing solutions on them.

Evident from the preceding discussion, the school principals' spiritual and ethical reality, their value systems, become the bedrock on which "the lead" in their leadership is premised (Elmeski, 2013; Riley, 2013). Ms Elegant values collaborative engagements and her leadership posture appears to be invitational. Drawing from the analysis of results data to inform planning for the forthcoming terms and counselling teachers regarding their teaching and learning actualities characterise conceptualisation. This consultative approach may encourage those teachers who encounter challenges to openly seek support knowing that they may be assisted to craft their solutions to their unique challenges and subsequently, own such solutions. One

on one meetings suggest that Ms Elegant acknowledges that though she and the teachers are in the same school, they may contend with different challenges. Consequently, she does not pre-empt what their challenges and solutions could be.

One of the recent international reform trends in education that has been gaining momentum is "quality management tools" in education (Li, Hallinger & Ko, 2016, p. 80). Progressively shaping and reshaping what the school principals prioritise and the day to day leadership practices of school principals are quality management and accountability imperatives, together with associated monitoring systems (Li, Hallinger & Ko, 2016). Executing monitoring operations without using instruments of monitoring is futile as it may lack clear purpose and may be easily derailed. To this end, it is not enough to just have monitoring instruments, school principals need to ensure that such instruments are quality-driven and quality-targeting. Amongst others, such quality surveillance instruments need to clearly outline the scope specifications of what it is meant to monitor. This is crucial as it impacts on the leadership practices of school principals which may set the teaching and learning tone of the school. Mr Communist put the monitoring systems in place. Such systems are instruments-driven. This practice enables Mr Communist to set clearly the accountability imperatives in the school. The focus of Mr Communist's surveillance operations is on ensuring that teachers go to class prepared, having access to what happens inside classroom walls and progress on quarterly basis. Having a monthly programme of class visits is indicative of Mr Communist's consciousness about the significance of ongoing, consistent close monitoring (Alkadri, 2019) and his understandings that monitoring can have considerable positive impact on teacher professional development and school improvement (Dammas & Alharthy, 2019). This is a manifestation of servant leadership practices embracing conceptualisation, foresight and stewardship (Spears, 1998). For it to maximise achievement of its ends, close surveillance of teaching and learning cannot be an episodic activity. The following, is what Mr Communist shared:

> *I lead by example. I'm always at school, if I'm not at school for some reason; somebody must know. We monitor the curriculum. We have a monitoring plan. I designed three monitoring tools: lesson plan monitoring tool, class visits monitoring tool and quarterly monitoring tool. Lesson plans are submitted to HODs because teachers can't go to class without being prepared. HODs have a monthly programme of class visits though there was resistance when we started.*

We do announce class visits because we do not want to pick a fight with the union. Amongst others, HODs check compliance with annual teaching plans, curriculum coverage, marking of learners' work and remedial work programmes. After class visits I interview each HOD on every teacher; then the HODs submit a written report regarding what they have discussed with me. In quarterly monitoring we check if marks are recorded properly, the teacher has done all the required tasks or tests, if such tasks have been moderated by HODs and if there is 100% coverage. If not, we interview the teacher to find out how much has not been covered, what the teacher's recovery plan is, and impact of outstanding tasks on the learner. If the HOD interview reveals a teacher who poses serious challenges I go directly to that teacher so that they account to me regarding what their issues are. Using a moderation tool, we do pre-moderation and post-moderation to check if assessments meet requirements. I also submit my work to my HOD.

The need for quality surveillance tools has exerted more pressure on the school principals to adopt a more closely involved approach to monitoring what unfolds inside the classroom and deploy standardised systems to surveillance of teaching and learning activities. (Li, Hallinger & Ko, 2016). Given the monitoring systems that are in place, Mr Communist closely monitors how the core business of the school unrolls on day to day basis. The class visits defy the notion of teaching being a solo practice which aligns with the benefits of having a home-bred community of practice in his school. This suggests that he and his participant counterparts understand that lesson plans may not reconcile with some actual classroom practices as per lesson plan and work actually covered *vis-à-vis* annual teaching plans. Class visits by the school principal as curriculum leader are an integral component of close surveillance of core business operations of schools (Lucky & Ogechi, 2019). Conversely, inference drawn though from the principal's narrative of only having announced class visits is that had it not been for avoiding a clash with organised labour, Mr Communist would have also wanted to conduct unannounced class visits. Lastly, it was clear that monitoring in general and class visits in particular feed into interviews with teachers, HODs and subsequent possible interventions.

Clearly, the support of the school principal and other SMT members is crucial in the process of ensuring that the capacity of the teachers regarding their professional capital is developed (Gurr, 2019). With Ms Elegant, the role of monitoring teaching and learning is distributed as it includes the principal, the deputy principal and the HODs. In the case of Mr Communist, Ms

Assertive and Ms Passionate, monitoring involves the principals and the HODs since they are small schools without deputy principals. Regardless, all participant principals subscribed to the approach of close surveillance of their schools' core business operations. Such close surveillance need strategic planning, being able to appreciate the past and the present and becoming a servant of the people being served. These constructs constitute conceptualisation, foresight and stewardship (Spears, 1998) that the school principals embodied. Given this, regardless of the actualities of contexts within which schools are found, successful principals make it their mission that the core business of the school, teaching and learning, is not compromised (Hallinger, 2013). Irrespective of the rural contexts in which these participant schools are located, deploying close surveillance the school principals ensured there was a culture of teaching and learning and the quest to improve the quality of education was alive. Furthermore, school principals attached great value to leading by example as they were also scrutinised by the same surveillance instruments they introduced in their schools in terms of those who had classes to teach.

7.3 Particularities of experience among participants

The particularities of experience include: leveraging stakeholder support: it takes a village to raise a child, a leadership practice tailored to achieve more with less and enacting leadership that commodifies time.

7.3.1 Leveraging stakeholder support: "It takes a village to raise a child"

In a number of traditional African communities and cultural traditions, including those in South Africa, raising children is considered a collaborative enterprise of the whole village (Murovhi, Matshidze, Netshandama & Klu, 2018). Hence the African proverb "it takes a village to raise a child." To this end, families, communities and their cultural capital have a critical role to play in the rearing of village children as a collective (Murovhi et al., 2018). This suggests that communities would have a culturally common vision and code of practice regarding how their children are raised. It follows that the rearing of children, being a communal endeavour, embraces the collective contributions of all village adults towards the upbringing that is generally acceptable in the community. There could be variations regarding the manner in which this African proverb is phrased in different African countries and communities however the focus remains on collective child-rearing (Murovhi et al., 2018). Ms Assertive subscribes to the belief that raising children is not only the responsibility of individual families or

individual parents but it is a collective responsibility that need to involve every adult and structure in the community including the school. In mitigating her leadership realities at school, she mobilised community agency involving different community members and recognised structures. By so doing, Ms Assertive highlights on of the key constructs of servant leadership which is community building (Spears, 1998). She values the role of the village in the ensuring that they guide the village children to become responsible adults hence her invitational posture towards child-rearing. From the horse's mouth, Ms Assertive spelled out:

> *I work closely with the community. We had a problem of learner absenteeism and late coming and learners would give lame reasons for such. Other than parents of leaners, we decided to involve traditional leadership of amakhosi (chiefs) and izinduna (headmen), pastors and other church leaders and political leaders. We are in rural areas, people respect izinduna and Inkosi. We invite them to school and engage them about what their vision is about the school. We encourage pastors to preach about education in their churches and Sunday school as our learners attend those churches. I encourage Inkosi and izinduna to talk about education in their own meetings and community meetings. Learners will see that their education is not a matter for the school and the teachers but it is the business of everyone in the community. If it is Inkosi that says every child who is between five and fifteen must be at school, parents will make sure that their children are coming to school. I even told them that late coming is not a responsibility of the teachers only, it's for the whole community. I told them that as induna or an adult you cannot turn a blind eye when you see children loitering under the trees during school hours. You must tell them to go to school they are late. Ingane (child) will realise that there is no place to hide; people at church and around the community talk the same language. Now that thing is really working for us as a school.*

It is the entire village that rears children in Venda culture, one of the African communities in South Africa (Murovhi et al., 2018). This means that the concept of "biological parents" is relegated to the shadows in the child rearing discourses. My child is your child irrespective of whether you know that child or that child's parents. Ms Assertive encouraged community stakeholders to operationalise and live the philosophy embodied in "it takes a village to raise a child" in the quest to tackle the social-ills that manifested in the behaviour of learners in the school. Distinctly, what is at the heart of this traditional child-rearing institution is communal

learning and teaching (Makalela, 2018). Such village co-parenting, co-teaching and co-learning are community-centred which suggests that they are or may be responsive to the actualities of the community.

Communal rearing of children shuns individualistically-inspired teaching and learning in this context. It prefers that young ones be taught as a collective in traditional structures even beyond the bounds of their homes (Makalela, 2018). Such a community-centred approach may ensure that there is uniformed and consistent teaching and learning amongst the children of the village. Moreover, with Ms Assertive's school being a primary school, it is very critical to forge meaningful partnership with parents if early childhood education is to be effective (Knight-McKenna, Hollingsworth & Ammerman, 2019). In this case, parents may not only refer to biological parents, it could be adults in the community.

It is in this vein that Ms Assertive has begun to reap the fruits of partnership with the school community and communal rearing of children. Having had a number of break-ins at the school in the past, she has observed that since she tapped into the community agency, the break-ins have stopped. They last had a break-in five years ago. Ms Assertive revealed the following: *"In our school we had a problem of vandalism and burglary. So I talked to these leaders. I brought them on board. I can tell you, this is the fifth year since our last break-in."* Ms Assertive understands that children need to be raised in an environment and with a behavioural code that pursues common good for the ultimate common good of the community. Enlisting the agency of community members, the community at large and the children in particular may grow up knowing it is their responsibility to preserve their school.

Traditional leadership is, in the main, the custodians of cultural capital in rural African communities and people voluntarily listen to them and comply (Murovhi et al., 2018). There is no written code of such indigenous capital, it is transferred from generation to generation through oral tradition which is also embodied in traditional songs and dance (Murovhi et al., 2018). It is to this end that Ms Assertive took advantage of the respect accorded to traditional leaders in her quest to ameliorate the social-ills that played out inside the school. Being the custodians of indigenous knowledge, Ms Assertive also invited traditional leaders and other community leaders from time to time to school to address learners on cultural and other issues. Ms Assertive had this to report:

At times we invite amakhosi, izinduna and other community leaders and give them some slots in our annual school functions to say something to learners. Normally, every year we have one big school function. Last year, it was Awards Day, that year it was HIV/AIDS Day. We invited them. At times I even call them to address learners about cultural issues regarding what was done in the past which is no longer practised today. We call them, they see that we respect them and we are giving them their place. The school is part of the community so it must be seen working with the community, not for the community. I just call a community member, to come and talk about this issue to our learners. Community members must see that the school is theirs and they are part of the school.

School principals that genuinely appreciate the indigenous knowledge systems, community agency and the belief systems of the community that allow the interests of learners to take centre stage, amongst others, are able to make substantial inputs in engendering involvement and successes of the community and its children (Davies, James, Hasley & John, 2019). Given this, Ms Assertive understands that the school may fight a losing battle regarding the spillages of social-ills into the school arena if community agency and cultural capital are relegated to the shadows. She has since made significant inroads in her quest to stop the break-ins, absenteeism, late coming and has created a conducive atmosphere to teaching and learning at school.

7.3.2 A leadership practice tailored to achieve more with less

Metaphorically in this instance, given their day to day operational adversities; some school principals of participant primary schools in rural contexts are still expected to perform at the same level as their counterparts in other contexts. This means these principals may not be expected to raise issues unique to their schools as a "reasonable" reason for being unable to be on par with other schools with regard to academic performance. Accordingly, for their schools to remain on track to the benefit of their leaners and the community, they need to deploy specialised strategies, approaches and attitudes commensurate with their contexts. Essentially, this means their deployments need to be engineered to achieve more for less.

In her mission to neutralise her school's adverse actualities Ms Elegant deploys her own financial resources. She also negotiates a payment plan with the service providers. Ms Elegant had this to share:

State funding is not enough hence we have a provision in the finance policy that says should the school run out of funds, the principal may use his/her own money to pay for operational costs and pay for salaries of support staff if they have means. The SGB agreed to refund me once school funds are deposited. Since we started this year without funds the school survives through my own pocket. We keep records of people we owe and pay them when we receive our allocations.

The provisions of the school finance policy are formulated to accommodate the fiscal actualities of the school. Consenting to using her purse to help the school, is testimony to Ms Elegant's leadership practice of striving to accomplish more with less. Considering that Ms Elegant is not obliged to use her own money to keep the school afloat, what she does is an act of selflessness to the benefit of learners. Furthermore, when Ms Elegant started in 2014 the school did not have some of the most critical resources which are generally used on day to day basis. The school had to ask for assistance from the neighbouring schools. Using the very same "inadequate state funding" that the school relies on, Ms Elegant has gradually been able to procure some of these materials. Ms Elegant recounted:

When I arrived here there were no photocopying machines. They did not even have electricity. In grade R learners used to sit on carpet on the floor in winter and in summer. They had to go to another school if they wanted to run copies. In three years I was able to buy machines, office furniture that you see and learners' desks.

In the face of previously and currently insufficient school allocations, Ms Elegant was still able to secure resources and infrastructure for the school that her predecessors appear to have been unable to achieve. This indicates that prudent financial decisions enabled Ms Elegant to optimise the value of the otherwise constrained financial capacity. I argue that in some cases even if the school funds are considered adequate, if they are not disbursed judiciously the inadequacy of funds narrative may be an artificial reality and perpetual.

Despite adversity, Ms Assertive made it her mission to play her role in sustaining her school and developing her learners. She did not plead helplessness, instead she exhibited ethics of hard work in ensuring that the core business at her school was not compromised. The following, is Ms Assertive's account:

The challenge we are facing as a no fee school is that we rely on money from the department which is too little given our day to day needs. Right now my school does not even have chalk. We have already started making debts. When the money comes we have to repay all the debts we have made. When doing the budget I have to prioritise. I am also very good at fundraising or getting sponsors. My school is painted and half of the school yard is paved but that money did not come from the department. It is my hard work in applying for donations. Even though we don't have enough resources but with the little that we have I make sure that all educators are getting what they need in class to support what they are doing. Though my school is this poor, though my learners are this poor, but that does not make me and my team to be discouraged. I am not changed by circumstances, because I am very strong, I am producing very good results. Even the enrolment has improved, when I started there were 265 learners but today we have 386 learners. Despite poor support of the community when I started as a principal, it was through my and my team's hard work parents have started to support us now

Ms Assertive has made some strides in a bid to turn the school around amidst hiccups involving restrained resource capacity. She attributes the strides she has made to the ethics of hard work together with the teachers. Now the community is involved in the education of their children. The beneficiaries of her hard work are learners and the community at large. She negotiates with business people to buy on credit and pay later and goes all out to secure funding for the school.

Conversely, she believes that adversities have not changed the strong person she is and the current academic performance speaks for itself. As a result, there have even been a surge in enrolment. Ms Assertive gave the following account:

Staffing the school in terms of PPN is not fair to us. Our classes are overcrowded. I only have one class with 37 learners, the rest of them are in the 50s. In my grade 6 they are 70 in one class. We deal with all kinds of learners with different challenges, therefore we do inclusive education. Remember that some of us are not trained in inclusive education. We are doing our best and I also believe our education is quality education because I said our learners are able to compete with other learners form different racial backgrounds; which means we provide them with quality. I do have floor space but human resources is a problem.

Ms Assertive contends with overpopulated classes, inadequate teachers and teachers who are not qualified to teach learners with special needs. She also cries foul of the teacher post funding model that does not address her classroom realities. This indicates that according to the PPN the school has enough teachers *vis-à-vis* their enrolment but the material conditions on the ground paint a bleak picture. In spite of all of this, Ms Assertive strongly believes that they are still able to fulfil their mandate since their learners have the capacity to contest their counterparts in a mixed race context.

Ms Assertive understood that they had to tap into differentiated potentials of their learners while being conscious of local context. She uses a place-based approach to developing learners holistically. Though the school does not offer Agricultural Science as a subject, she still affords learners the opportunity to be exposed into what may currently alleviate poverty but ultimately enable them to participate meaningfully in the local economy. Possessing conceptualisation as a servant leader, Ms Assertive viewed the organisation holistically on the basis of what has happened in the past and what needs to happen or will happen in the future hence the aforementioned practice (Greenleaf, 1977). Ms Assertive explained:

> *In our school we promote healthy living so I encourage learners to have gardens. We have a school garden here. As a teacher myself I take some learners to the garden to teach them how to plant vegetables as I have written here on the timetable. It is very important to teach our learners in totality because it is not all of them who are going to succeed academically. Some will make a living on this. They can plant vegetables, eat them and sell them. We are trying to promote all the skills.*

What determines the success of a school, amongst others, is how prudent they are able to utilise time as a resource (Koko, Abere & Luke, 2019). Being able to fit in an activity that is not part of the prescribed curriculum needs effective time management. Ms Assertive was able optimise time they have at their disposal to involve gardening without compromising teaching and learning processes. This indicates that Ms Assertive understood her rural context not on the basis of what they do not have (Hlalele, 2014) but on the basis of how learners can exploit their community capital, strengths, skills and resources to enhance their livelihoods and the quality of education in the school (Myende, 2014; Myende & Chikoko, 2014). This is a gradual shift

from the deficit tale to strengths-based epistemologies on rural contexts. Learners are taught to use land, an available resource, to alleviate their plight.

7.3.3 Enacting leadership that commodifies time

The core business of the school is teaching and learning. For teaching and learning to be effective the school needs to maximise time available. Accordingly, in the schools the basic resource is time (Koko, Abere & Luke, 2019). As a resource, when time is used inefficiently or inappropriately, it can never be recovered (Kerzuer, 2009). Time is therefore a critical commodity. Without the ethics of maximising this commodity, the core business of the school may be derailed and learners may be short-changed. This means even if a school may have all the resources in abundance but if they do not use available time optimally such resources become futile. Ms Passionate and Ms Elegant subscribed to the strong ethics of exploiting this commodity. This is mirrored in their strategic planning. Ms Passionate held her staff meetings in the morning before the school started or after school hours to ensure that they did not interfere with teaching and learning times. Ms Passionate had this to announce:

> *We do admissions from September the previous year. A day before learners open, they come to school for orientation, they are allocated classes and we distribute stationery. It has been happening since I started here in 1997. We have our staff meetings at 6h30 in the morning. It's not that I am forcing teachers to be here at that time, they are already here. If there are so many meetings we remain behind after school. At 5 o'clock in the afternoon you find teachers here at school working and singing.*

Some schools are not time conscious which ultimately adversely affect learners' academic performance (Koko, Abere & Luke, 2019). While some schools may infringe on teaching and learning times to accommodate their meetings or registration of learners during the first few days after opening, Ms Passionate appeared to consider time a crucial commodity. Her strategic planning ensures that time allocated for the school's core business is generally not compromised. Teachers even voluntarily sacrificed their time and remained behind to fulfil their responsibilities.

Ms Elegant used morning prayers for briefings which strategically defused the need to have some staff meetings but where necessary meetings were held after school hours. This suggests

that she was "conscientised" about using prescribed school hours judiciously. School principals need to proactively and constantly support their teachers by *inter alia*, positively interacting with them on a day to day basis (Koko, Abere & Luke, 2019). Ms Elegant and her teachers started every day on a positive note with a prayer which was then followed by briefings. Ms Elegant had the following to explain:

> *I'm very sensitive about contact time. If we have meetings, we wait until after school hours; we don't hold it during contact time. We do not disturb classes. For example, yesterday we were here until 15h30. What indicates cooperation is that we hold our meetings late; teachers do not complain. Or else we have meetings in the morning. In the morning we have teachers' morning prayer before we go to learners' assembly. That is where we have our morning briefing. Even educators are not allowed to use cell phones during classes unless they have reported they have a problem. They know that there are consequences if they are caught.*

What signals the success of curriculum delivery, amongst others, is the manner in which teachers use time allocated to teaching and learning (Mulenga, 2019). It appeared as if teachers at Ms Elegant's school have also been "conscientised" about effective use and management of contact time as they do not grumble about meetings held after school. Moreover, the use of mobile phones by teachers during contact time is regulated save for a reported emergency. Both Ms Passionate and Ms Elegant contend with inadequate resources but they are able to make the most of what they have in terms of resources. It is in this context that judicious time management culminates in a desired school performance trajectory in the face of constrained resource capacity (Koko, Abere & Luke, 2019). This suggests that adequate resources alone without time consciousness or a concerted effort to use available time prudently may cause a school to veer off a turnaround trajectory to the detriment of learners.

7.4 Chapter conclusion

In response to the third research puzzle, this chapter addressed the leadership practices of rural school principals. There were practices that were common across many participants referred to as the commonalities of experience and those that varied involving one or two participants referred to as the particularities of experience. Leadership cannot be divorced from the context in which it is enacted as leadership practices are the ultimate manifestation of the interplay between leadership and context. Leadership being context-sensitive does not translate into

leadership practices being context-driven. Further, rural localities are not homogenous and leadership practices of school principals in rural contexts cannot be homogenised. Contextual dynamics have an influence on the constant evolution of leadership practices in response to prevalent dynamics.

In the next chapter I present the synthesis of the study including the summary and conclusions of the study, theoretical and methodological reflections of the study, theoretical contributions of the study and the implications of the study for further research.

CHAPTER EIGHT

DRAWING TO A CLOSE: SYNTHESISING THE INQUIRY

8.1 Introduction

Chapter Seven dealt with the analysis of narratives. The chapter focused on responding to the last research sub-puzzle, namely: *What are the day-to-day leadership practices of these principals of rural primary schools?* The leadership practices of the primary school principals in rural contexts was discussed in two main sections, namely: commonalities of experience and particularities of experience among the participants.

The purpose of this chapter is to synthesise the study and draw this inquiry to a close. In the presentation of this chapter, I commence with a recapping of all chapters with emphasis on what I considered to be key learnings in each chapter. Highlighting the key learnings in each chapter is important as they ultimately feed into the conclusions of the study. The recapping of chapters is followed by the conclusions of the study. I conclude around each research sub-puzzle. Thereafter, I present the theoretical and methodological reflections of my study. Next are the theoretical and methodological contributions of this study. Lastly, I explore the implications of this study for further research.

8.2 Recapping the study

Chapter One introduced the study and provided the backdrop against which the study unfolds. Reflectively and reflexively, I engaged with my personal and professional experiences in light of the prevalent scholarship to provide a rationale. Engaging with my personal and professional experiences, I appreciated that unbeknown to me, my professional practices as a Head of Department and Acting Deputy Principal manifested my early life experiences. Such intra-engagements equipped me with what to anticipate in the process of generating field texts. I therefore understand that there is an interchange between personal and professional experiences. The main research puzzle that the study sought to answer was: *What are the lived experiences of principals leading primary schools in rural contexts?* It was to be addressed by three research sub-puzzle. The chapter also presented the key operational concepts of the study.

Chapter Two presented the review of literature related to the study. This chapter discussed recurring issues and debates in the existing scholarship. The main relevant literature review themes I identified were: Shifting discourses on the deficit approach to understanding rurality

(which was discussed under the sub-themes: the deficit tale and the shift and strengths-based epistemologies on rurality), leading schools in diverse settings (under the sub-theme: leadership: practices and contexts), adversities facing rural schools, "one size fits all" education policies, school leadership in challenging contexts, promoting teaching and learning in rural schools as well as leadership and identity. Evidently, context-embedded leadership practices of school principals and the context-responsive education policies are very crucial in the process of transforming education in rural contexts. Furthermore, there is a gradual shift from deficit conceptualisations to strengths-focused epistemologies on rural contexts; a shift that may assist people in those contexts to harness their community capital to find solutions to some of the problems they experience, instead of waiting for solutions to be parachuted from the Department of Basic Education or other external agencies.

Chapter Three presented a trilogy of theories that underpin the study. These theories are as follows: social identity theory, theory of rurality and servant leadership theory. The study is framed within this trilogy of theories in terms of identity, school contexts and leadership practices. This trilogy is the meaning-making framework of the study. The theoretical framework becomes the overarching lenses through which I frame the study to deepen its understandings. I used social identity theory to understand the construction of identities of school principals and the theory of rurality to understand the dynamics of the context within which the schools are located. Lastly, I deployed the lenses of the servant leadership theory constructs to understand and explain the leadership practices of the school principals. The theoretical framework needs to generally embrace all facets of the study because if it does not, the sense-making process may be flawed, marred by inconsistencies and may show gaps or silences in understanding thereby compromising the trustworthiness of the study.

Chapter Four focused on the research design and methodology employed in the study. This chapter commenced by discussing the interpretivist paradigm within which the study is positioned. I utilised narrative methodology. Narrative inquiry as a qualitative research methodology, with all its intricacies, was both thought-provoking and fascinating. Venturing in to the field to generate field texts without a set of pre-determined questions was challenging as I needed to think on my toes in terms of ensuring the interview was not derailed, probing and follow-up questions based on the flow of the conversations. Instead of having pre-determined questions, I had to ask the participants to recount their lived experiences. For people to be able to open up about their early life experiences, in particular, I had to open up about my

own experiences and cultivate trust amongst the participants. After sharing their early life experiences, I learnt that it became easier to tell me about their professional experiences.

Chapter Five presented narrative analysis which is the first level of analysis. This chapter responded to the first research sub-puzzle: *Who are the principals leading primary schools in rural contexts?* The chapter presented the narratives of the lived experiences of the school principals. Each participant's narratives were configured into a meaningful whole through identification of plots. This process is called re-storying the stories. Further, narratives are tri-faceted as they embrace the interplay of commonplaces of temporality, space and sociality. Therefore, narratives of experiences of school principals reflect the past, the present and the future, they are context-embedded and they are characterised by socio-cultural dimensions. Participants' stories of the past inform the present and the stories of the present inform the future in an overlapping manner. This phenomenon occurs in different contexts as participants move from one space to another and interact with different people and groups. Lived experiences are embedded in time and place. As inquirers we embrace our emotions, hopes, cultural dispositions and morality and those of our participants. I have learnt that the stories people tell are the stories they live by and consequently, their identities are storied constructions. I have also learnt that individual's storied experiences are fluid in nature based on the above-mentioned interplay of temporality, space and sociality.

Chapter Six was the first of the two chapters (chapters 6 and 7) that presented the deconstruction of narratives which is the analysis of narratives. This chapter addressed the second research sub-puzzle: *What meanings and understandings do the principals draw on in their leadership of rural primary schools?* Therefore the chapter focused on the personal and professional meanings and understandings that influence school principals' leadership practices in rural contexts. These meanings and understandings reflected who these school principals are as individuals and professionals in their leadership terrains. Key findings included, amongst others, a religiously grounded educator, a family orientated matriarch, a caring pedagogue, a motivated educationalist, a revolutionary teacher, a teacher leader "in the making" and a resilient country girl. I have realised that personal and professional selves are interwoven hence the personal and professional meanings and understandings constantly influence one another.

Chapter Seven was the second chapter that presented the deconstruction of narratives. The chapter discussed the leadership practices of primary school principals *vis-à-vis* their rural contexts in response to the last research sub-puzzle: What are the day-to-day leadership practices of these principals of rural primary schools? The principals' leadership practices mirrored their unique contextual actualities. Some of the key findings were "*izandla ziyagezana*" as metaphor for *Ubuntu* practices of school principals' leadership, context-responsive leadership: making policy malleable to respond to local needs, leveraging stakeholder support: "it takes a village to raise a child" and a leadership practice tailored to achieve more with less. To this end, leadership practices need to be understood against the backdrop of the school contexts in which they are operationalised. I have learnt that understandings of leadership outside the bounds of its context are deficit understandings and therefore handicapped and exclusionary.

8.3 Conclusions of the study

The main research puzzle was about exploring the lived experiences of school principals leading primary schools in rural contexts. The main research puzzle was addressed by three research sub-puzzles. Conclusions are then drawn around each research sub-puzzle. Accordingly, this section is presented under the following themes: identities of principals leading primary schools in rural contexts, meanings and understandings that the principals draw on in their leadership of primary schools and leadership practices of primary school principals.

Figure 8.1 below illustrates the main research puzzle and three research sub-puzzles.

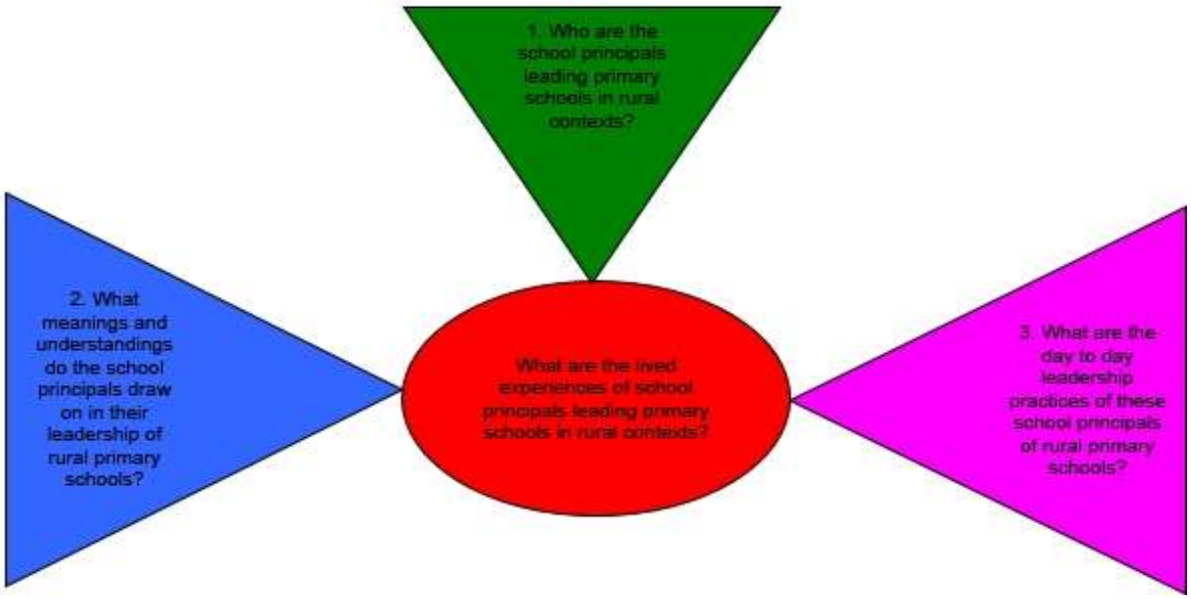

Figure 8. 1: The main research puzzle and sub-puzzles

8.3.1 Identities of principals leading primary schools in rural contexts

As individuals, people become members of different social groups which essentially constitutes who they are. In a given lifespan individuals enjoy membership of a cocktail of social groups hence their unique set of social identities (Stets & Burke, 2000). Thus, school principals are affiliates to different social groups; with the very first one being their families. Being the principals of primary schools is a component of the participant principals' identities. Further, the identities of school principals are binary in nature comprising personal and professional identity (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009). However, these binaries are inter-relational in their manifestations. They share a mutual relationship as personal identity and professional identity reciprocally mirror each other. They are different but they cannot be divorced from each other. It follows that school principals hold membership of a diverse range of social categorisations in both their personal and professional domains of identities. From the personal and professional narratives of their lived experiences, I was able to establish the identities of the school principals because their narratives are constituent parts of who they are. Amongst others, the participant principals are teachers, parents, spouses, members of communities, union

activists, providers, founders, visionaries and affiliates of religious denominations (see Chapter Five).

Some of the principals' lived experiences were pleasant and some were unpleasant. In the case of the latter, had I not started by sharing my painful experiences, I realised that school principals would have been reluctant to "open old wounds." Some of these painful experiences included, inter alia, divorce, losing a fiancé, loss of loved ones, abusive husband, unplanned pregnancy, contending with abject poverty and being unable to afford education fees (see Chapter Five). Such experiences culminated in the development of attributes like serving selflessly, community building, resilience, proactivity, commitment to school core business, motivation and compassion, amongst others. To this end, how school principals define a constituent part of the principal self is premised on the prescriptive framework applicable for each social group. What constitutes this prescriptive framework are attributes of different social categorisations. The sum total of all the attributes of these social groups are constituent parts in the process of identity construction comprising the personal self and professional self. Given this, what then validates an individual's membership of a social group or groups and how an individual is described, is adherence to the prescripts of that/those group/s. Such adherence involves how the school principals behave, how they lead their schools or their thinking processes. For instance, understanding their accountability mandates, the study found that school principals enacted leadership practices that aimed to achieve more with less, led by cultivating home-bred communities of practice and operationalising leadership that responded to local realities, amongst others. This means school principals understand and define themselves and their roles against the backdrop of the prescriptions of social categorisations.

The vast and varied lived experiences of school principals are deployed in the process of negotiating and re-negotiating their personal and professional selves. In the face of the process negotiating and re-negotiating, I submit that personal and professional selves cannot remain static in the midst of day to day life experiences. Despite their poverty stricken family backgrounds, the study revealed that the school principals managed to qualify as teachers. As school principals, having been from such backgrounds they enact Ubuntu practice of "*izandla ziyagezana*" to reach out to learners from indigent family backgrounds and they optimise the little they have in terms of resources. It is in this vein that I claim that identities of school principals are not unidimensional, instead they are multi-faceted. Through the lenses of the theory of rurality, what people do and experience in a space, whether rural locale or urban

locale or both, have the capacity to construct and re-construct identities (Balfour, Mitchell & Moletsane, 2008). Some principals were born in rural contexts but they now live in urban areas and lead schools in rural contexts. One principal was born and bred in a township but she now lives in the suburbs and leads a school in rural contexts (see Chapter Five). The essence of the school principals' identities cannot be confined to a particular space as their experiences are constructed across a range of spaces based on the interaction with the different worlds of experiences.

8.3.2 Meanings and understandings that the principals draw on in their leadership of primary schools

The vehicle through which the processes of interpretation, explanation and justification of the behaviours of individual school principals unfold is the prescriptive framework of social groups (Tajfel, 1981). It is through the lenses of such a framework that the school principals' meanings and understandings are premised. Consequently, the identities of school principals drive their processes of making meaning of their lived experiences. This sense-making process becomes a construction and re-construction of the school principals' unique meanings and understandings. A principal's professional meanings and understandings are informed by personal meanings and understandings and vice versa. For instance, the sense of proactivity that some school principals had as they grew up and before they became principals is reflected when they take initiative to set up home-bred COPs in order to harness the shared professional capital and enhance effectiveness of teaching and learning at their schools. Logic in terms of manifestation of principals' meanings and understandings in their leadership practices may not find its sound expression in the absence of either of the two. Engaging with the narratives of school principals, I learnt that these meanings and understandings of self descend (derive) from their lived experiences. These personal and professional meanings and understandings include, amongst others, a religiously grounded educator, a family-orientated matriarch, a revolutionary teacher and a teacher leader "in the making." (see Chapter Six).

What then initially becomes a repository of lived experiences constantly culminates in a repository of meanings and understandings that the school principals draw on in leading and managing their schools. These meanings and understandings are not confined to individual "repository boxes" but they are fluid commensurate with the life experiences that feeds into them and the contexts within which such experiences unfold. Repository boxes are reservoirs

of meanings and understandings. Metaphorically, these repository boxes of meanings and understandings are similar to an "electronic control unit" (popularly known as a computer box) that controls electronic operations in a car so that its performance output is optimised. This means the day to day leadership practices of school principals are informed by the personal and professional meanings and understandings that are contained in their repository boxes. Such repository boxes of meanings and understandings in the principal self maximise and customise the leadership outputs (practices) of the school principals. It is to this end that I claim that the school principals' leadership practices are inextricably linked with their meanings and understandings.

8.3.3 Leadership practices of school principals

What fundamentally shapes and re-shapes the leadership practices of school principals is what works in a given context which in some cases may take precedence over some policy mandates. Deciding on what works for the school is informed by the school principals' meanings and understandings. The influence of school contexts can no longer be shrunk to the margins in school leadership discourse. Given that contexts have their unique varying intricacies, the content and outputs of enacted leadership practices need to be commensurate with the level of intricacies prevalent in such a context. In the absence of such congruence, a school principal's bid to set the school on a transformation trajectory may be arrested before it even takes off. Leadership practices essentially become a manifestation of the principals' response to the day to day operational actualities of their individual schools. It is in this vein that the principals invoked both their individual agency and community agency in the leadership of their schools which rebutted the deficit-based epistemologies of schools in rural contexts. By so doing, they refuted the narrative that the only lifeline that can save schools in rural contexts is "parachuted" interventions and assistance form the Department of Basic Education or other foreign agencies. Enabling the school principals to devise home-grown lifelines was their understandings of the dynamics of their unique school contexts. These understandings which ultimately shape leadership practices are informed by the principals' personal and professional meanings and understandings. In some cases their lifelines shared some similarities while in other cases they had different specifications in response to given actualities. Amongst others, the leadership practices include leading by cultivating home-bred communities of practice, close surveillance of teaching and learning: conceptualisation and foresight and "*izandla ziyagezana*" as metaphor for Ubuntu practices of school principals' leadership (see Chapter Seven). These practices were

born out of the quest for shared professional repertoire and continuing professional development, delivery of quality public education and catering for the basic needs of indigent learners respectively.

The leadership practices are context-embedded. This means, whether leadership practices are effective or not can only be determined within the parameters of contexts within which they are operationalised. Considering leadership practices out of context may render such resultant considerations flawed and misleading. The school context having an influence on the leadership practices that school principals espouse does not necessarily mean that school principals are inflexibly and helplessly driven by context. However, it means that how they decide on leadership practices to uphold depends on the extent to which such practices mitigate their leadership realities for the optimum benefit of their schools. This involved consciously relegating some "one size fits all" policy prescripts in the quest to make their schools work despite adversities. Therefore, operational leadership practices are a result of a constant process of negotiation and re-negotiation of what works and what does not in any given individual school context. Espousing some leadership practices instead of others results in some spheres of contexts being influenced by those practices. Accordingly, while contexts may dictate how school principals lead, who they are also influences how they lead and shape contexts.

8.4 Reflections of the study

Reflections of this study are presented as follows: theoretical reflections and methodological reflections.

8.4.1 Theoretical reflections

The theoretical underpinnings of this study are made up of an assemblage of theories. These are servant leadership theory, social identity theory and theory of rurality (Greenleaf, 1977; Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Balfour, Mitchell & Moletsane, 2008). I drew on the servant leadership theory to deepen my understandings of the leadership practices of school principals. I was able to frame the school principals' leadership practices within the constructs of servant leadership. Many leadership practices of school principals epitomised characteristics of servant leadership like listening, empathy, persuasion, conceptualisation, foresight, stewardship, commitment to growth of others and building communities, amongst others. These leadership practices were, *inter alia*, "*izandla ziyagezana*" as metaphor for Ubuntu practices of school principals'

leadership, leading by cultivating home-bred COPs, enacting leadership that commodifies time and leveraging stakeholder support: "it takes a village to raise a child." The theoretical lens also afforded me understanding of the rationale behind the modification and enactment of some leadership practices instead of others. This embraced the spirit that each leadership practice embodied. While servant leadership is a Western conceptualisation, in Africa its constructs are compatible with the constructs of the philosophy of *Ubuntu*, amongst others. For instance, "*izandla ziyagezana*" as the metaphor for *Ubuntu* inspired-leadership practice of extending a helping hand to others is compatible with the features like stewardship, commitment to growth of others and building communities in servant leadership. Hence, while the constructs of servant leadership are well-documented and demarcated, some of the constructs of *Ubuntu* are embodied in the African proverbs prevalent across African communities like "it takes a village to raise a child." However, the challenge I faced is that servant leadership does not embrace personal and professional meanings and understandings as they inform the leadership practices of school principals.

To understand who the school principals leading primary schools in rural contexts are, I drew on social identity theory. This theory afforded me the framework to understand the process of identity construction and the school principals' identities. I appreciated that school principals held diverse membership of different social groups hence their multiple identities. However, these social groups evolve and so are their attributes. Consequently, the identities of school principals evolve based on their day to day life experiences. For instance, a school principal who, as a union activist in her previous school, perceived methods of her former principal of tool-inspired monitoring teaching and learning as oppressive was the very same person who adopted those methods on assuming principalship. I realised that as the school principals' identities evolved, their meanings and understandings also evolved. It follows then that the individual principal's process of identity construction and identity trajectories are not close-ended. Based on their current social identities, school principals prefer membership of particular social groups to others. This is social comparison which also characterises social identity theory. Therefore, choosing social groups is not a haphazard process but it requires the school principals to engage in a process of comparison and evaluation of existing groups on the basis of their attributes and how they understand the principal self. Hence, the school principals belonged to different teacher unions. Some school principals were SADTU members and others were NATU members. Furthermore, the changes that the school principals introduced in their schools could not have worked had they had low self-esteem. Self-esteem,

one of the constructs of social identity theory, amongst others, constituted who the school principals are. Introducing and managing changes like holding meetings outside of prescribed contact time and introducing an English programme, amongst others, reflected the school principals' positive self-esteem. Such self-esteem indicated that they were motivated and determined to make a difference in the leadership of their schools.

Lastly, the theory of rurality was the vehicle through which I understood the contexts within which the participant primary schools are located. I appreciated that rurality as a context has its own strengths and areas that need development. Rural locales are not stagnant spaces and therefore, neither are they homogenous in terms of their actualities. Some of the adversities that rural contexts contend with are not peculiar to urban contexts. What then distinguishes rural contexts from urban contexts is the extent of the intensity of those adversities. Through the lenses of the theory of rurality, I realised that what essentially affects the level of intensity of adversities in rural contexts is the interplay of forces, agencies and resources. These are constructs of this theory. For example, some schools are far away from the main road which means transport is not easily accessible and teachers may have to miss school when they have to attend workshops. While in urban contexts workshop days may not cause inadvertent absence of teachers from schools since transport is generally readily available. I was able to appreciate that communities in rural contexts can use their own strengths or assets to enhance effectiveness of their schools and their livelihoods. Exploitation of their strengths enabled them to rebut helplessness posture and victimhood narratives and take charge of their own development. The community agency was tapped into when the school principal mobilised intervention of traditional leadership and other community structures to mitigate, amongst others, learner truancy. The school principals also drew on community agency when they asked the local taxi association and some companies operating in the area respectively to help learners stricken by poverty. This mirrors that the practices of school principals are context-laden. The school principals' responsiveness to the context of their leadership was based on their understandings of their contexts. If they did not have deeper understandings of their contexts, their responsiveness could have been impeded or constrained to the detriment of their schools.

Further, only one school had an enrolment of more than nine hundred learners. I learnt that some families have migrated to urban areas to, amongst others, find employment. Hence other schools were sitting at less than four hundred. I understood that in some cases the declining enrolments in schools in rural contexts may be triggered by the exodus of people to urban

localities even though some did not reside in urban contexts permanently. They maintained contact with their rural folks.

8.4.2 Methodological reflections

The study employed narrative inquiry methodology which is clearly qualitative in nature. I generated field texts through life story interviews, collage inquiry and artefact inquiry. The life story interviews enabled me to generate thick narrative accounts of the school principals' personal and professional experiences. Since this type of interview is conversational in nature, our sessions were very relaxed. Such an atmosphere encouraged the participants to open up and excavate deeper into their reservoirs of lived experiences. Since the school principals did not tell their stories in chronological order, I had to keep on probing in order to grasp the coherent whole and spot the gaps. With some stories the participants appeared more than ready to tell me more while with others they would only scratch the surface. To figure that out I had to listen attentively and be tactical in probing beyond the scratch of the surface lest the participants perceive me as being intrusive. With some participants it became a back and forth exercise between personal and professional experiences as they told their stories. In some cases, participants would get carried away by their storylines and take different directions not pertinent to questions at hand. Given this, I had to tactically nudge them constantly back to the relevant direction in order to maintain the storyline. Further, I was daunted by the volumes of field texts generated and by pages and pages of interview transcripts later on. Regardless, I learnt that in the life story interviews participants were more relaxed since the sessions were more of an everyday conversation. With the stories that they felt more comfortable sharing or good memories, participants dug deeper hence further indulging in irrelevant narratives in some cases.

Before I organised a collage inquiry session I developed my own collage which captured my personal and professional experiences. Showing it to the participants helped them to understand what a collage was in the context of the study and how they could develop their own collages. Some of the collage-triggered narrative accounts of participants' lived experiences were similar to those generated in the life story interviews but some were either new or they added thicker details to the already told stories. Some school principals had more pictures about their early life experiences and fewer pictures on their professional experiences and vice versa. I had to give them another chance to revise their collages so they become a fair reflection of both

personal and professional domains. In their reflections at the end of each session, all the participants admitted that they enjoyed the process of collage development and presentation of their collages. They acknowledged that it taught them reflective practices in both their personal and professional lives and some even wanted to keep their collages. However, it was not easy to find suitable pictures for their collage development and in some instances, magazines were not readily available. I had to go on a hunting expedition to find magazines for them. On failing to find pictures they considered suitable in magazines, some even used some still photos on their collages. By admitting that collage development has made them to pause and look back at how far they have come, I learnt that developing a collage is not a simple cutting and pasting process. Before a picture is cut or pasted, participants have to engage a reflective mode first in interacting with their social worlds; the outcome of which is manifested in the choice of pictures.

Lastly, I found my own artefact and intra-engaged with it before I arranged an artefact inquiry session with each participant. I brought my artefact along to one of our sessions. Indeed, the artefact that each school principal chose elicited some memories. Their artefacts elicited mixed narratives, some from personal and others from professional domains. Some artefact-prompted narrative accounts became a "crack filler" to stories related during life story interviews or saturated what has already been told. In some cases, artefacts elicited lived experiences which were not shared in both the life story interviews and collage inquiry or not shared in either of the two. The artefacts embodied the day to day lived experiences of the school principals. They became a window to their experiences which was reflected in their artefactual interpretations of their experiences. I learnt that the participants' artefacts were identity-laden, represented who the principals have been, who they are currently and their cultural capital in given contexts. To this end, school principals valued their artefacts. The only constraint I encountered was that some participants found it very difficult to choose an artefact for the inquiry because, amongst others, they were not sure whether it can capture what they intended it to capture *vis-à-vis* the study.

8.5 Theoretical contributions of the study

The key learnings of this study include understanding that the identities of school principals are manifold and they are constantly informed by their lived experiences. These lived experiences of personal and professional selves are building components of diverse meanings

and understandings that inform how the school principals lead and manage their schools. The leadership practices of school principals are influenced by school contexts. This means that the sense-making framework of leadership practices is context in which leadership practices are operationalised. The school principals' personal meanings and understandings of self inform the professional meanings and understandings of self and vice versa. Having these domains (personal and professional) drawing from each other is a cross-cutting phenomenon.

The leadership practices of school principals become a manifestation of their personal and professional meanings and understandings of selves within a context. This means school principals' leadership is not only a manifestation of their meanings and understandings but it also embraces the interplay between the leadership and the rural contexts in which their schools are located. This interplay sensitised the school principals about their unique contextual practicalities and their responses were commensurate with such practicalities. This was evident in practices that exploited the strengths prevalent in rural contexts which is the rebuttal of deficit narratives on rurality. For instance, in response to the English language competency challenge encountered by their learners on joining secondary school ranks, the school principals started programmes that aimed to enhance competencies of their learners in the language of teaching and learning. In a bid to accommodate the basic needs of learners from indigent family backgrounds the school principals enacted *Ubuntu* leadership practice embodied in "*izandla ziyagezana*" by catering for those needs. Further, one school principal made time for gardening in the school timetable to enable learners to ameliorate poverty using land at their disposal and tap into the potential of those who may want to embrace agriculture as their career in relation to their rural background, amongst others. In addition, in the quest to avoid compromising contact time, two school principals decided to hold staff or SMT meetings either in the morning before the school starts or after school. What therefore plays out in the manifested leadership practices are personal and professional meanings and understandings of principal self and the outcome of interaction between leadership and rural context. In this case, rural context embraces community capital and community agency. To this end, personal and professional meanings and understandings and context are agencies that affect the process of negotiation and re-negotiation of the leadership practices. Combined, the personal and professional meanings and understandings inform each school principal's agency as an individual. The above practices, amongst others, are characterised by multi-agency approach to school leadership. Multi-agency comprises personal meanings and understandings, professional meanings and understandings, and context. The first two are intra-agencies and

the last one is both intra and external. Intra-context is person-embedded context and external context refers to the external environment with which the school operates including, *inter alia*, socioeconomic status of the school community and policies.

It is the school principals' individual agency that triggered their initiative in crafting programmes that addressed their unique realities. It is also their agency that invoked community agency and stakeholder agency in the quest to alleviate adversities and transform the school. Given the dynamics of the school principals' leadership actualities, school principals drew on multi-pronged agency in a bid to make inroads in school effectiveness irrespective of their school context. The school principals understood that invoking one agency while relegating other agencies to the shadows could culminate in "self-inflicted" adversities. For instance, contending with the unfolding of social ills inside the school, the school principal mobilised community agency involving traditional leadership, church and political leaders. These people exploited community capital to the benefit of their school. Had the school principal relied on her individual agency only and excluded community agency, she would have fought a losing battle in eliminating some social ills at the school in a community where people still respect the rule of law by *Amakhosi*. Therefore, deploying one agency to the exclusion of others would have defeated the ends of a much-needed multi-dimensional agency. To this end, the leadership practices of the school principals are both a cross-cutting of personal and professional meanings and understandings and operationalisation of multi-agency within and beyond the bounds of their schools. This is the leadership I identify as the Cross-cutting and Multi-agency Leadership (CML).

Cross-cutting and Multi-agency Leadership Model is illustrated below in Figure 8.2.

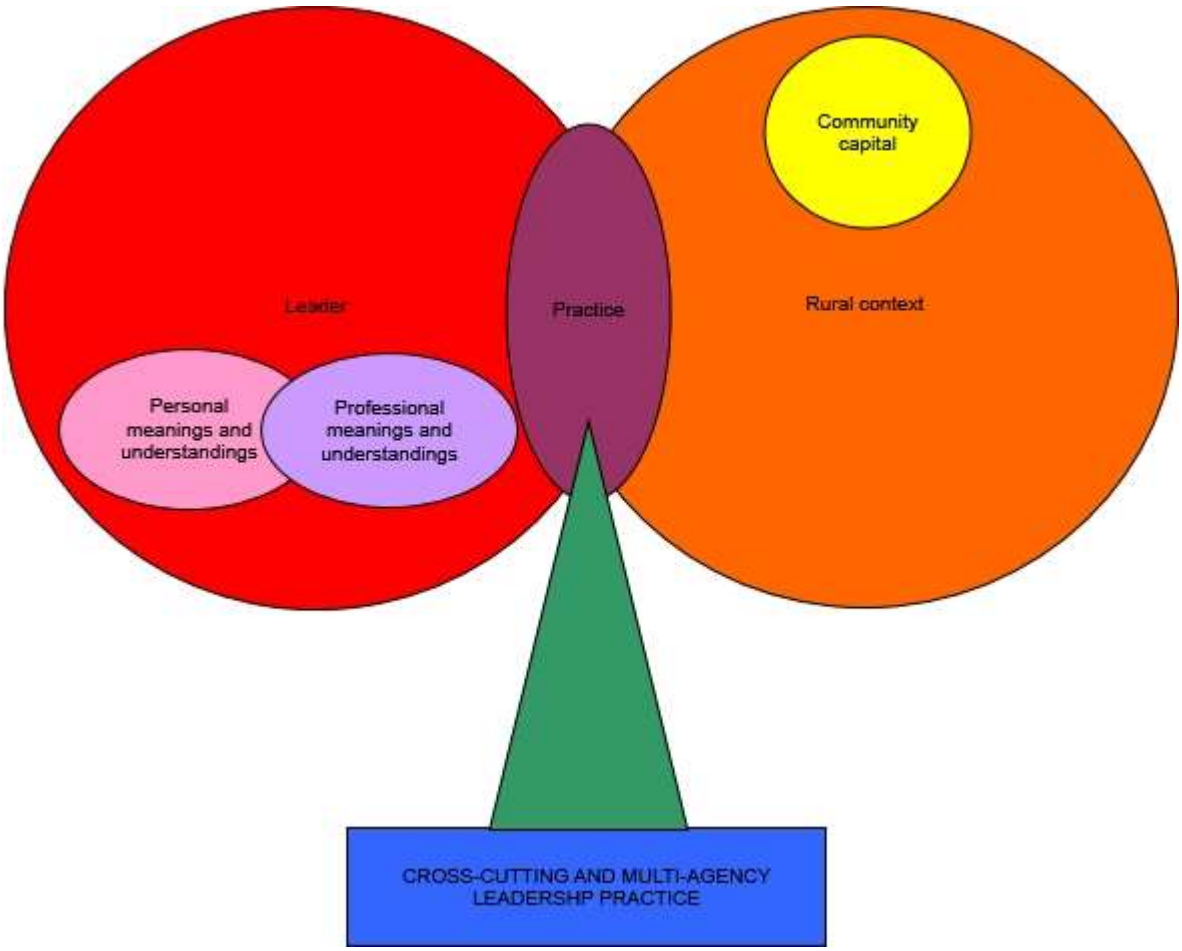

Figure 8. 2: The Cross-cutting and Multi-agency Leadership Model (CMLM)

8.6 Implications of my study for further research

Firstly, school principals have multiple identities. Such identities have a bearing on how they enact their leadership. The interplay between the identities of school principals, their personal and professional meanings and understandings and contexts manifests itself in their leadership practices. Therefore, the identities of school principals can no longer be relegated to the margins because who the principals are, shape their leadership. Though scholarship is prevalent regarding the interaction between leadership and context, however the identities of school principals as they shape context and are also shaped by context are not highlighted. While leadership needs to be understood and defined against the backdrop of context in which it is enacted, similarly, it is important to understand who the school principals are since it also feeds into their day to day leadership practices. This means school principals' identities feed into their professional identities which then derives corresponding meanings and understandings.

To this end, going forward as the research community, we need to start pondering about embracing research on the identities of school leaders in the understandings of leadership.

Secondly, this study revealed that the influence of personal experiences of school principals can be traced in their leadership and management of schools. These personal experiences include, *inter alia*, their cultural capital. In the wake of the school principals' unique leadership actualities, some school principals invoked their indigenous knowledge in their quest to mitigate such actualities. Consequently, some of these school principals' leadership practices mirrored their indigenous knowledge systems. This means that the indigenous knowledge can be an agent of change regarding the lead in the leadership of school principals and it can therefore shape and re-shape how leadership is operationalised in a particular context. To my fellow researchers, I suggest that in their future research they begin to consider the influence of indigenous knowledge meanings and understandings on the enactment of leadership in different contexts and in the African context in particular. We need Africa home-grown scholarship regarding how leaders can harness indigenous knowledge to enhance effectiveness of their leadership.

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Appendix A

FIELD TEXTS GENERATION MANAGEMENT PLAN AND RESEARCH INSTRUMENTS

Three methods will be used to generate field texts (data). These methods are narrative (life story) interviews, collage inquiry and artefact inquiry. Four data generation sessions over four days will be scheduled with each participant.

RESEARCH PUZZLE AND SUB-PUZZLES

1. What are the lived experiences of school principals leading primary schools in rural contexts?

a) Who are the school principals leading primary schools in rural contexts?

The study needs to ascertain who these school principals are which involves what their identities are and what constitutes their identities. How these principals identify themselves characterises their leadership in rural contexts and how they execute their leadership mandates.

b) What meanings and understandings do the school principals draw on in their leadership of rural primary schools?

This question intends to examine the leadership experiences of these primary school principals unique to their schools and their rural contexts. Examining their day-to-day leadership experiences, stories will be used since experiences are the storied phenomena. This will provide deeper understandings and insights into the realities of their leadership terrain in such contexts.

c) What are the day-to-day leadership practices of these school principals of rural primary schools?

From their leadership narratives, the study needs to explore the meanings and understandings that inform how these school principals lead in primary schools in rural contexts. Exploring the meanings they attach to their worlds through their stories and the understandings they negotiate through such a process enhance the understanding of a framework within which their leadership is premised.

RESEARCH INSTURMENTS

DAY ONE: BRIEFING

I will brief each participant regarding the research topic, focus and purpose, the aim and objectives of the study, ethical protocols, signing of informed consent, expectations throughout the research process, possible convenient times for each session and the different data generation methods that will be used.

DAY TWO: NARRATIVE INTERVIEW

Participants to provide biographical information and narratives of personal and professional selves/leadership experiences as school principals leading primary schools in rural contexts. This session seeks to understand the participant principals' early life and professional backgrounds/leadership experiences/practices involving the realities/complexities/highlights/successes regarding their leadership experiences in rural primary schools.

Informing this narrative interview session will be the following:

- Who the school principals are (gender, age range, family background, early life experiences including experiences as a learner, educational background and qualifications and leadership lessons/experiences.
- School principals' day-to-day experiences of leading primary schools in rural contexts (realities, adversities, organisational culture, community background, relations with learners, school-community partnership and other stakeholders).
- Meanings and understandings that these school principals draw on as leaders of rural primary schools. Meanings and understandings that shape their day-to-day leadership practices – early life (personal) and professional experiences.

DAY THREE: COLLAGE INQUIRY

Having developed my collage before this session, I will explain to the participants what my collage represents regarding my personal/professional experiences. Then, I will give participants magazines, ask them to develop their collages by cutting out pictures and/or words and sticking them on the chart/s provided. Thereafter, the participants will be requested to tell stories (personal and/or professional) represented by the contents of their collages.

Amongst others, this session will be informed by the following:

- Explain why you chose each of these pictures on your collage.
- Share what each picture represents or symbolise about your early life experiences, professional life experiences or day-to-day leadership practices/experiences of leading a rural primary school.
- What does it feel like to engage with this activity? (Describe emotions that this collage development evoke).

DAY FOUR: ARTEFACT INQUIRY

I will have shown the participants my artefact during the previous session and asked them to choose any object/artefact that triggers memories regarding their personal and professional selves. In this session, I will start by showing them this artefact again and narrate to them stories (personal and/or professional) that are prompted by it. After that it will be the participants turn to reveal their artefacts and narrate artefact-triggered stories.

Following are the possible artefact inquiry prompts:

- Why did you choose this object or artefact?
- What does this artefact or object represent or symbolise about your early life experiences, professional life experiences/leadership experiences or practices as a primary school principal in rural contexts?
- What is the time period of this artefact?
- Do memories triggered by this artefact involve others? Who are they and what role did they or still play in your professional life? How do they influence (if any) your leadership of a rural primary school?
- How does this activity make you feel? /What emotions does this artefact evoke? Explain where those emotions originate and how they may influence your day-to-day leadership experiences in rural context.

Appendix B

UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULU-NATAL
INYUVESI YAKWAZULU-NATALI

16 October 2017

Mr Zamokwakhe Thandinkosi Ncokwana (212558677)
School of Education
Edgewood Campus

Dear Mr Ncokwana,

Protocol reference number: HSS/1758/017D
Project title: The dynamics of leading in rural contexts: Narratives of primry school principals

Approval Notification – Expedited Approval

In response to your application received on 21 September 2017, the Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee has considered the abovementioned application and the protocol has been granted **FULL APPROVAL.**

Any alteration/s to the approved research protocol i.e. Questionnaire/Interview Schedule, Informed Consent Form, Title of the Project, Location of the Study, Research Approach and Methods must be reviewed and approved through the amendment/modification prior to its implementation. In case you have further queries, please quote the above reference number.

PLEASE NOTE: Research data should be securely stored in the discipline/department for a period of 5 years.

The ethical clearance certificate is only valid for a period of 3 years from the date of issue. Thereafter Recertification must be applied for on an annual basis.

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

Yours faithfully

.....
Dr Shenuka Singh (Chair)

/ms

Cc Supervisor: Dr Inba Naicker
Cc Academic Leader Research: Dr SB Khoza
Cc School Administrator: Ms Tyzer Khumalo

Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee
Dr Shenuka Singh (Chair)
Westville Campus, Govan Mbeki Building
Postal Address: Private Bag X54001, Durban 4000
Telephone: +27 (0) 31 260 3587/8350/4557 **Facsimile:** +27 (0) 31 260 4609 **Email:** ximbap@ukzn.ac.za / snymanm@ukzn.ac.za / mohunp@ukzn.ac.za
Website: www.ukzn.ac.za

Appendix C

education

Department:
Education
PROVINCE OF KWAZULU-NATAL

Enquiries: Phindile Duma | Tel: 033 392 1041 | Ref: 2/4/8/1349

Mr ZT Ncokwana
26 Calendula Crescent
Avoca Hills
4051

Dear Mr Ncokwana

PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN THE KZN DoE INSTITUTIONS

Your application to conduct research entitled: **"THE DYNAMICS OF LEADING IN RURAL CONTEXTS: NARRATIVES OF PRIMARY SCHOOL PRINCIPALS"**, in the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education Institutions has been approved. The conditions of the approval are as follows:

1. The researcher will make all the arrangements concerning the research and interviews.
2. The researcher must ensure that Educator and learning programmes are not interrupted.
3. Interviews are not conducted during the time of writing examinations in schools.
4. Learners, Educators, Schools and Institutions are not identifiable in any way from the results of the research.
5. A copy of this letter is submitted to District Managers, Principals and Heads of Institutions where the Intended research and interviews are to be conducted.
6. The period of investigation is limited to the period from 22 September 2017 to 09 July 2020.
7. Your research and interviews will be limited to the schools you have proposed and approved by the Head of Department. Please note that Principals, Educators, Departmental Officials and Learners are under no obligation to participate or assist you in your investigation.
8. Should you wish to extend the period of your survey at the school(s), please contact Miss Connie Kehologile at the contact numbers below
9. Upon completion of the research, a brief summary of the findings, recommendations or a full report/dissertation/thesis must be submitted to the research office of the Department. Please address it to The Office of the HOD, Private Bag X9137, Pietermaritzburg, 3200.
10. Please note that your research and interviews will be limited to schools and institutions in KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education.

ILembe District

Dr. EV Nzama
Head of Department: Education
Date: 27 September 2017

..Championing Quality Education - Creating and Securing a Brighter Future

KWAZULU-NATAL DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Postal Address: Private Bag X9137 • Pietermaritzburg • 3200 • Republic of South Africa
Physical Address: 247 Burger Street • Anton Lembede Building • Pietermaritzburg • 3201
Tel.: +27 33 392 1004/41 • Fax.: +27 033 392 1203• **Email:**Phindile.Duma@kzndoe.gov.za •**Web:**www.kzneducation.gov.za
Facebook: KZNDOE....Twitter: @DBE_KZN....Instagram: kzn_education....Youtube:kzndoe

Appendix D

PERMISSION LETTER TO THE PRINCIPAL

26 Calendula Crescent

Avoca Hills

4051

6 September 2017

The Principal

……..

Sir/Madam

RE: REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH AT YOUR SCHOOL

My name is Zamokwakhe Thandinkosi Ncokwana (student number: 212558677), a Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) candidate at the University of Kwa-Zulu Natal (Edgewood Campus). I am required to conduct research as a requirement for this degree. I therefore kindly seek your permission to conduct research in your school. The title of my study is: **The dynamics of leading in rural contexts: Narratives of primary school principals**

This study will focus on examining the dynamics of leading primary schools in rural contexts. The purpose of the study is to narratively understand the lived experiences of principals leading primary schools in rural contexts. The objectives of this study are: to determine who the school principals leading primary schools in rural contexts are, to examine the day-to-day leadership experiences of these school principals of rural primary schools and to explore the meanings and understandings that the school principals draw on in their leadership of primary schools. The study will use life story interview, collage and artefacts as data generation methods. This will involve only the school principal as a participant of the study.

It may also be beneficial to your school since it may initiate discourses on the dynamics of leading primary schools in rural contexts thereby triggering and entrenching the notion of reflective practice amongst the school community.

PLEASE TAKE NOTE OF THE FOLLOWING:

- There will be no financial benefits that participants may accrue as a result of their participation in this research project.
- Participants' identities will not be revealed under any circumstances, during and after the reporting process.
- All responses will be treated with strictest confidentiality.
- Pseudonyms (false names) will be used to represent participants' names.
- Participation is voluntary therefore, participants are free to withdraw at any time, should they so wish, without incurring any negative or undesirable consequences on their part.
- All engagements/interviews, as per the above-mentioned data generation methods, will be audio-recorded to ensure accurate reporting.

- Participants will be contacted in advance about the convenient dates and times for meetings/consultations/sessions.

For further information on this project, please contact my supervisor or the research office whose contact details are provided below. I hope that you will consider my request and grant me written permission to conduct my research at your school.

Thank you

Yours faithfully

……

Z.T. Ncokwana

Email: zncokwana@gmail.com

Cell: 0839903275

Research office:

Mr P. Mohun

HSSREC Research office

Email: mohunp@ukzn.ac.za

Tel: 031-260 4557

Supervisor:

Prof Inba Naicker

University of KwaZulu-Natal

(Edgewood Campus)

School of Education

Tel: 031-260 3461

Appendix E

CONSENT LETTER FOR EACH PARTICIPANT

26 Calendula Crescent

Avoca Hills

4051

6 September 2017

Dear Participant

INFORMED CONSENT LETTER

My name is Zamokwakhe Thandinkosi Ncokwana. I am currently registered for the Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) degree at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, Edgewood Campus. I kindly seek your consent to becoming a participant in my research project. My research project is entitled: **The dynamics of leading in rural contexts: Narratives of primary school principals.** This study will focus on examining the dynamics of leading primary schools in rural contexts. The purpose of the study is to narratively understand the lived experiences of principals leading primary schools in rural contexts. The objectives of this study are: to determine who the school principals leading primary schools in rural contexts are, to examine the day-to-day leadership experiences of these school principals of rural primary schools and to explore the meanings and understandings that the school principals draw on in their leadership of primary schools. The study will use life story interview, collage and artefacts as data generation methods.

Participation in this study may provide nuanced understandings of your lived leadership narratives which embraces your context and day to day leadership practices. Such understandings may further trigger different debates which may contribute to your quest to transform different facets of your school life.

PLEASE TAKE NOTE OF THE FOLLOWING:

- There will be no financial benefits that participants may accrue as a result of their participation in this research project.
- Participants' and schools' identities will not be revealed under any circumstances, during and after the reporting process.
- Pseudonyms (false names) will be used to represent participants' and schools' names.
- All responses will be treated with strictest confidentiality.
- Participation is voluntary therefore, participants are free to withdraw at any time, should they so wish, without incurring any negative or undesirable consequences on their part.
- All engagements, as per the above-mentioned data generation methods, will be audio-recorded to ensure accurate reporting.
- Participants will be contacted in advance about the convenient dates and times for meetings/consultations/sessions.

- Any information given by you cannot be used against you, and the generated data will be used for purposes of this research only.
- Data will be stored in secure storage and destroyed after five years.

For more information, I can be contacted at:

Email: zncokwana@gmail.com

Cell: 0839903275

My supervisor is: Prof Inba Naicker

University of KwaZulu-Natal, Edgewood Campus

College of Humanities in School of Education

Email: Naickeri1@ukzn.ac.za

Cell: 0823775253 or tel: 031-260 3461

You may also contact the Research Office through:

Mr P. Mohun

HSSREC Research Office,

Tel: 031-260 4557 or email: mohunp@ukzn.ac.za

Thank you for your contribution to this research project.

_____

Z.T. Ncokwana

Appendix F

CONSENT BY THE PARTICIPANT

DECLARATION

I ……. (Full names of participant) hereby confirm that I understand the contents of this document and the nature and purpose of the research project entitled: **The dynamics of leading in rural contexts: Narratives of primary school principals.** I therefore consent to participating in this study. I understand that I am at liberty to withdraw from the project at any time, should I so desire.

I hereby grant consent to the researcher (Z.T. Ncokwana) to audio-record our engagements/interviews (meetings/consultations/sessions) as per the data generation methods.

Circle which is applicable:

YES

NO

Signature of participant	**Date**
……..	**……**

Appendix G

FIELD TEXTS GENERATION PLAN

Unstructured life story interviews, collage development and artefact inquiry will be utilised in the generation of data. The process of data generation will be conducted over a period of five days for each participant. On day one, I will meet each participant for the purpose of introducing myself and getting to know the research sites in order to develop a good researcher-participant relationship. On day two and three, I will meet each participant for an unstructured life story interview which will focus on the life stories of the participants. Day four will be utilised for artefact-triggered narratives/discussions. The last day will be used for collage-prompted narratives/discussions.

Day one: Reporting at research sites

I will report at the research sites to introduce myself to the participant principals, explain the nature and purpose of the study, request a written consent and a written permission to conduct research at their schools and get to know the environment within which the schools are located.

Day two and three: Unstructured life story interviews

Oral interviews will be conducted with the participants. Participants will be requested to share their early life stories and their professional life stories as principals of primary schools in rural contexts. These participants' stories will involve their decisions and milestones, leadership practices, realities and complexities of leading primary schools in rural contexts.

Day four: Collage inquiry

Each participant will be requested to develop a collage displaying their early life and/or their day-to-day operations as school principals in rural contexts. Once the collage has been developed, I will then request each participant to provide a narrative behind the contents of the collage.

Day five: Artefact inquiry

Participants will be requested to choose an object that triggers important memories about their early lives. Each participant will be afforded an opportunity to tell the stories highlighting the significance of the chosen artefact.

Appendix H

Turnitin Originality Report

Mr by Z Ncokwana

From Thesis (PhD Thesis)

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Assignment: MEd Dissertation

Appendix I

25 Maple Crescent
Circle Park
KLOOF
3610

Phone 031 – 7075912
0823757722
Fax 031 - 7110458
E-mail:
dr1govender@telkomsa.net
sathsgovender4@gmail.com

Dr Saths Govender

25 MARCH 2020

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

LANGUAGE CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE

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

The dynamics of leading in rural contexts: Narratives of primary school principals,

by Zamokwakhe Thandinkosi Ncokwana**,** Student Number: 212558677.

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

Yours faithfully

S. Govender

DR S. GOVENDER

B Paed. (Arts), B.A. (Hons), B Ed.

Cambridge Certificate for English Medium Teachers

MPA, D Admin.