

**TEACHERS` PERCEPTIONS AND EXPERIENCES  
OF  
TEAMWORK AND COLLABORATION  
AND  
HOW THESE INFLUENCE SCHOOL EFFECTIVENESS  
A CASE STUDY OF TWO PRIMARY SCHOOLS WITHIN THE  
UMGUNGUNDLOVU DISTRICT  
KWAZULU-NATAL**

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the degree of Master of Education: Educational Leadership, Management and  
Policy**

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## DECLARATION

I, Nomusa Mfeka, declare that:

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This dissertation is submitted with/without my approval.

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## **DEDICATION**

I humbly dedicate this thesis to my late mother, Mrs Gladys Bongsi Mfeka (Nee Masikane). I started this journey with her but unfortunately she was not there to witness the end results when I finally reached my destination of completing this study. Her earnest love, support, encouragement and prayers made it possible for me to finish this study.

## **ABSTRACT**

The South African education system has, since 1994 gone through numerous changes and is still in the process of transformation. Even the changes that are happening outside schools like the fast growing pace of technology put pressure on our schools to transform as we are living in a global village. Given the current political turmoil in our country, it is surprising that education still receives so much attention.

I am therefore advocating, within our own department and beyond for more collaborative ways of working so as to always improve the way things are done. Our department is trying ceaselessly through policies and many other strategies to engage in the betterment of our schooling system but I feel that such interventions have not had much impact. A lot still needs to be done to engage people on the grassroots like teachers who are the implementers of most of these policies, parents and learners so as to get to the actual root of our education crisis. All what this means is that the problems in our schools are too huge and complicated for individuals to handle. We need co-operatives and strong partnerships for organisational development. I am convinced that such will have an impact on the schools' effectiveness.

In an attempt to get a true sense of what it means to work together, as the teachers in the study understood teamwork and collaboration to be, a case study of two primary schools within Umgungundlovu District, KwaZulu-Natal was conducted. This was done, as Kothari (1990) advocates, to deepen my perception and to get a clear insight on the subject of teamwork and collaboration as well as to investigate this "phenomenon within a real life context", (Maree 2007, p.5). Indeed the study revealed that there was teamwork and collaboration taking place in these schools though to a certain degree because of certain factors that either hindered or enhanced their implementation.

There were also benefits as well as challenges experienced by the teachers in the study that were associated with the implementation of these concepts. Teachers reported many positive experiences which included their empowerment and improved learner achievement which came partly as a result of the support they got from their School Management Teams (SMTs). They unanimously articulated the

positive effects. The questions that underpinned the study were answered and for any shortcomings that were encountered, recommendations are given in the last chapter of this dissertation, chapter five to only enhance it.

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## **CHAPTER 1**

### **INTRODUCTION AND ORIENTATION TO THE STUDY**

#### **1.1 Introduction**

This study is located within the field of educational leadership and management. It seeks to explore the perceptions and experiences teachers have on teamwork and collaboration and how these can impact on school effectiveness. The study firstly seeks to explore how the teachers in the two primary schools I have chosen as my research sites understand these concepts of teamwork and collaboration, what their views are on them. Further to that, what the role of the principal and the School Management Team (SMT) in promoting teamwork and collaboration is, are looked at. Finally the factors that may enhance or hinder the effective implementation of teamwork and collaboration in the two schools within the Umgungundlovu District, KwaZulu-Natal are then focussed on. The chapter discusses the background to the study, the research rationale or simply the researcher's interest in the study, the key questions that guide the study, the research design and methodology, theoretical framework that underpins the study and the layout of the whole dissertation. The purpose of this chapter is to inform the reader what to expect in this whole thesis. In a nutshell, this is a summary of the dissertation. I now move to the background to the study.

#### **1.2 Background to the Study**

My research interest to pursue the topic on teamwork and collaboration is inspired by my being an HOD in a big multi-racial primary school of over a thousand learners and a staff complement of more than forty educators which includes the principal, two deputy principals and four heads of department (HODs). Flowing from my experience as an HOD in this kind of setting, I realised how the SMT needed to work collaboratively as a team to deal with the challenges at school both from teachers' as well as the learners' perspectives. These challenges range from the discipline of our learners to curriculum matters for which no single person possesses all the expertise but call for complementary skills from a range of individuals. The notion is asserted by the Task Team Report on Education Management Development (1996)

which calls for a move towards more participation and collaboration in the practice of leadership and management of schools.

Furthermore, the South African Education System has gone through various changes since its democracy in 1994. Policies have been continually changed and revised. With regards to curriculum, the Outcomes-Based Education (OBE) approach was introduced, then the Revised National Curriculum Statement (RNCS) (2005) which was later revised to National Curriculum Statement (NCS) and most recently we have the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) (2012). Another policy innovation has been that of the Annual National Assessments (ANA) (2012) and a lot more others. Some principals, teachers and learners were, and are still overwhelmed and find it difficult to cope with and manage these new changes that are being introduced. It is for these reasons that Malen in Lindle (1999, p.4) argue that 'change breeds ambiguity and ambiguity provides opportunity for shifts in the power structures of most schools'. Further to that, this has informed my choice of theoretical framework which is that of distributed leadership with teacher leadership as its related concept. This will be discussed later in the chapter.

Jansen (2002, p.200) cautions about the 'evidence for understanding the policy-practice gap through the lens of political symbolism'. He argues that South Africa is overly fascinated with new policy statements but is less interested in their implementation. In addition to Jansen's (2002) concern I argue that there is a dearth of support for the implementers of new policies in our education system, which in most cases are the teachers on the ground. This has been my experience and observation as a teacher, that new policies are just cascaded through the hierarchical structures of our education management and teachers have become accustomed to that. This, I argue is one of the contributory factors why some policies do not become effective and do not gain much support. Harley, Barasa, Bertram, Mattson and Pillay (2000) share this sentiment as they argue that if teachers are not supported in implementing the policies, the consequences can be more severe than the expected change. They will rather experience the new policies as intimidating paperwork. Jansen (2002, p.202) further opines that "dramatic policy announcements and sophisticated policy documents continue to make no, or little reference to the modalities of implementation".

The legacy of apartheid in South Africa, has left our country with an education system, according to the Task Team Report on Education Management Development (1996, p10) “that is characterised by fragmentation, inequality in provision, a crisis of legitimacy and in many schools, the demise of a culture of learning as well as resistance to changing the way things have been done in the past”. The team therefore proposed an approach to education management that is integrative and collaborative. Integrative in so far as it informs all management processes and outcomes in an organized setting and collaborative in that it involves all staff and stakeholders hence the topic of my study. One of the impacts of apartheid on our education system is the traditional view of leadership which separates school leaders from teachers. In addressing this challenge, The Task Team on Education Management Development (1996) recommends that “management should not be seen as the task of the few, it should be seen as an activity in which all members of educational organisations engage. Management is about doing things and working with people to make things happen”, (p.8). It should be a process which involves all stakeholders so that “they feel ownership of the school’s mission and ethos”, The Task Team Report on Education Management Development, (1996, p.8). This idea resonates with one of my questions for my study which seeks to explore the principal’s and the SMT’s role in promoting teamwork and collaboration in schools. I also wish to agree with Spillane (2004) when he states that the most critical aspect of successful innovation in schools is leadership. My own observations are that leadership at the schools is not distributed the way it should be. The hierarchical culture of leadership still prevails in many schools with leadership only residing within certain individuals who hold formal leadership positions .It is against this backdrop that I perceive teamwork and collaboration as some of the strategies that can be employed to transform and improve our schools. I now proceed to the rationale for this study.

### **1.3 Rationale for the Study**

I understand the rationale to be the fundamental reason for doing something. In this regard I will refer to the rationale for my study as the main reason for my interest to embark on a study of this nature. My research interest on the subject which seeks to explore teachers` perceptions and experiences of teamwork and collaboration and how they impact on school effectiveness came about through my own experience as

first, a post level one teacher and then as an HOD. I have a feel and experience of teamwork and collaboration both as an ordinary member of staff and as an SMT member. Vithal and Jansen (2010, p.11) contend that the rationale recognises “how the researcher came to develop an interest in the topic and why the researcher believes the topic is worth researching”. I believe, like Ehrich and Cranston citing Drach-Zahavy and Somech (2002, p.44) that “teamwork offers the potential to achieve outcomes that could not be achieved by individuals working in isolation”. My intention in doing research on this subject is therefore similar to that of these authors. As an HOD I find myself immersed in various teamwork and collaboration activities with the teachers I am directly in charge of in my phase. I find teamwork and collaboration unfolding naturally and a lot of skills have been learnt and developed through this experience. Skills like communication, conflict management, time management and respect to mention but a few. Communication skills develop as I interact with members of the group when issues are being discussed. As we interact and share ideas, disagreements may arise which may lead to conflict. Time management is crucial in teamwork otherwise the goals that have been set will not be achieved. When members of a group are at work, it is important to show respect for each other and the views that members bring to the group. This personal experience combined with the desire to improve teamwork and collaboration at my school triggered my interest to pursue the subject so as to obtain deeper insight thereon.

Further to that, as an SMT member, I have observed with concern how the SMT is reactive to staff problems because of the dearth of teamwork and collaboration among its members in planning and making decisions together. Cranston, Enrich, Reugebrent and Gavin cite Hall and Wallace (1996) who state the two types of learning opportunities for SMTs as planned induction and structured development activities. Without these, the SMTs cannot cope with the challenges and the team`s effectiveness as a unit will not improve. I hope the findings for my research will provide some useful feedback to the schools to improve their practices regarding teamwork and collaboration both within the SMT and staff. I am mindful of the fact that the nature and scope of my study, which is qualitative within an interpretivist paradigm, will not provide solutions but rather give a better insight on the subject and

the dynamics of schools. I also hope that the study will add to the existing literature on the subject. I move now to the purpose of the study.

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

For almost two decades, the South African Education System has been flooded with numerous changes and innovations. These have placed huge demands on principals and the way they manage their schools. Principals' roles have changed as a result of devolution and school-based management that were introduced by the South African Schools Act (1996). This complexity in the management of schools has called for more collaborative activities. This also calls for a distributed form of leadership and collaboration as strategies to improve schools during these challenging circumstances (Ainscow, Muijs and West, 2006).

Further to that, as an HOD in a large, urban primary school, I too have been touched by the problems in our schooling system, the incompetency displayed by some of our leaders which Ejimofor (2010) argues is due to the lack of induction when these teachers are promoted to leadership positions and promotions based on nepotism and favouritism by labour unions. On the other hand, there are problems that emanate from curriculum changes and the disciplinary problems of our learners faced by some of our teachers. These and many more others impact negatively on school effectiveness. I therefore share Ferguson's (2006, p.2) sentiment who suggests that "as schools restructure and reform for the 21<sup>st</sup> century, educators are being required to work together in more ways". I also believe that in responding to the ever changing South African Education System, teamwork and collaboration can be some of the most powerful tools that can be employed to effect the necessary changes.

The purpose of this study was therefore to explore perceptions and experiences teachers have about teamwork and collaboration and how these impact on school effectiveness. It was also anticipated that the study will help, in particular leaders and educators of the two schools to see the needs for adjustments in their performance of duties and also to deepen their insight on the subject. The gaps that are evident in the existing literature on the research topic and the challenges besieging our South

African Education System are an inspiration for my research focus. However I do acknowledge the other challenges that come with their implementation. Even though this study is not a panacea for the challenges that schools face, it was, however anticipated that it could make some invaluable recommendations that might help impact on school effectiveness in a positive way. Furthermore, the study was intended to inform educators and SMTs of the need to develop skills that might transform positively their perceptions of the teaching profession with the view to engaging and committing them to students` achievement and progress.

### **1.5 Research Questions**

#### Core Question

What are the teachers` perceptions and experiences of teamwork and collaboration and how do these influence school effectiveness?

#### Subsidiary Questions

1. How do teachers understand teamwork and collaboration in schools?
2. What role does the SMT play in promoting teamwork and collaboration in schools?
3. What factors inhibit or enhance teamwork and collaboration in schools?

### **1.6 Research Design and Methodology**

The research project was designed as a case study to explore teachers` perceptions and experiences of teamwork and collaboration and how the two can influence school effectiveness. I found a case study appropriate for this study because as Maree (2007, p.5) citing Yin (1994) defines a case study as “an empirical enquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within a real life context”. Kothari (1990, p.141) asserts that “a case study deepens our perceptions and gives us a clear insight into life”, while Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2007, p.254) refer to a case study as giving a “thick description”. My own study measured up to these definitions of a case study mentioned above.

The topic of my study, which was mentioned earlier directed my study towards a qualitative approach. Ivankova and Creswell (2007, p.254) define qualitative research as “an enquiry process of understanding, where the researcher develops a

complex holistic picture and conducts the study in a natural setting”. They add that qualitative samples are small, purposively selected from individuals who possess the most knowledge and experience on the studied phenomenon. Furthermore, using an interpretive paradigm, I sought to understand the feelings and experiences of teachers on teamwork and collaboration as they occur in the real world. This notion is asserted by Neuman (2011) when he states that for an interpretive researcher, the goal is to know more about the feelings of the participants and to look at things the way they do. Through an interpretive paradigm, the researcher seeks to obtain the insiders` perspective of the studied phenomenon. Niewehuis (2007, p.58) asserts that “interpretive studies attempt to understand phenomenon through the meanings that people assign to them”. It was for this reason that my study adopted this kind of research orientation. During the enquiry into teachers` perceptions and experiences of teamwork and collaboration and their influence on school effectiveness, I employed two research instruments to generate my data which consisted of closed questionnaires and focus group interviews.

### **1.7 Data Collection Methods**

Firstly, a large scale survey of twenty teachers from each of the schools was conducted. Questionnaires were administered which consisted of first, the teachers` biographical information then a few structured, closed questions. A Likert Scale of one to four was provided for the teachers` responses. The purpose of the survey was to gain background information about the participants and also as Maree (2007) suggests, to learn about their views, opinions and behaviour and to see the world through their eyes. The questionnaires had clear instructions and participants had to complete them in the researcher`s absence as Cohen et al (2007, p.344) advise that participants can “devote as much time as they wish to its completion within their familiar surroundings”, which I feel afforded the participants freedom to respond and think carefully about their responses without having the pressure from the researcher to finish them.

The second level of the research was the focus group interviews with six participants from each school. I intended having three male and three female teachers in each of the focus groups. Three of the participants were SMT members and the other three were post level one educators. This sought to obtain diverse views and responses

from the participants. Participants had an opportunity to discuss issues with each other and any disagreements that arose during the discussions were explored in detail. Niewehuis (2007, p.90) supports this notion as he states that “group interactions widen the range of responses, activating forgotten details of experiences, releasing inhibitions that may otherwise discourage participants from disclosing information”. During the discussions, an audio recorder was used with the permission of the participants as to capture the details of the discussion for analysis purposes and also to ensure that the researcher had full focus on the discussion without having to be interrupted by the taking down of notes. However, notes were taken down discreetly without disturbing the process.

### **1.8 Design Limitations**

The study did not set out to observe teamwork and collaboration in practice. It was heavily reliant on the views expressed by the respondents through the questionnaires and the focus group interviews that were conducted. Therefore the study was open to some validity threats, however I believe that the use of more than one data collection method and the rigour of my data did address this threat. On the other hand, the use of more than one data collection method was a potential challenge to me as a novice researcher when it came to data analysis. As Neuman (2011) warns that coding, which is one of the strategies I employed for my data analysis, is not an easy exercise for novice researchers to embark on, I did experience some difficulty in that regard but with more reading and understanding of the process, I managed.

### **1.9 Theoretical Framework**

To locate my study, I used a theoretical framework which signals where my research came from as suggested by Vithal and Jansen (2007). The theory that underpinned my study was that of distributed leadership as defined by Gronn (2000) and Spillane (2004) as well as the complementary concept of teacher leadership as expressed by Muijs and Harris (2003) and Katzenmeyer and Moller (2001). Muijs and Harris (2003) are of the idea that teachers must be given opportunities to lead within their schools. Against this backdrop I then discussed where the ideas of distributed leadership and teacher leadership developed and how they relate to my own study.

Distributed leadership can be conceptualised as “an emergent property of a group or network of individuals in which group members pool their expertise”, a notion that works well to the idea of teamwork, Gronn (2000, p.324). It also requires the “re-distribution of power”, Grant (2010, p.57) and “the capacity to relinquish, so that the latent, creative powers of teachers can be released”, Barth (1988, p.640). For Spillane (2006, p.26) distributed leadership is “constructed in the interactions between leaders, followers and their situations”. Muijs and Harris (2003) suggest that distributing leadership means giving teachers opportunities to lead and take responsibility within their organisations. Distributed leadership is, according to Gronn (2000), an idea whose time has come, whereby teachers take on the responsibilities once reserved for formal leaders in the administrative hierarchy (Darling-Hammond, Bullmaster and Cobb 1995).

In addition, I aligned myself with the conceptual framework of teacher leadership which is embedded in the distributed leadership theoretical framing which emphasises that leadership needs not be located in the position of the principal but can be stretched over a range of people who work at different levels in a school. Harris and Lambert (2003) describe teacher leadership as a model of leadership in which teaching staff at various levels within an organisation have an opportunity to lead. Grant (2008) concurs as she states that teacher leadership is a form of leadership beyond headship or a formal position which I suggest is one of the features of teams. Any teacher, regardless of any formal position they hold, can lead the team as long as they have the expertise to do so. The idea underpinning this view is that leadership is not positional but it is a group process which involves a range of people. Harris and Lambert (2003, p.43) assert that teacher leadership has its focus on improving learning “and is a model of leadership premised on principles of professional collaboration, development and growth” which I believe teamwork and collaboration do. The following section will provide a brief outline of this dissertation.

### **1.10. Layout of the Dissertation**

This dissertation comprises five chapters with each chapter addressing a different aspect of the study. The first chapter introduces the reader to the entire study by explaining the background and rationale for my study. Research questions, which

guided my whole study are outlined, research design and methodology as well as the theoretical framework are also tabled therein. Chapter Two gives an account of the vast body of international and local literature I have reviewed that is relevant to my topic of teamwork and collaboration. The main reasons for reviewing this literature were to gain a deeper insight on the subject of my study for analysis purposes and to identify any gaps that might exist to recommend further research. Chapter Three focuses on the research design and methodology. It discusses the methods, ethical considerations and limitations to the study. Chapter Four unveils the research findings from the data generated from the questionnaires and focus group interviews that I used as my chosen data collection instruments. The Fifth and last chapter concludes the dissertation by summarising the main findings of the research project and making necessary recommendations for further research on the subject.

## **Chapter 2**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **2.1 Introduction**

In the midst of a political storm that exists in our country, education still receives a lot of attention. Education reforms are being debated and ways to effectively measure success and constantly improve our education are sought. This is evident in the curriculum reforms that are being introduced, policies that are constantly reviewed and changed and a plethora of other changes that are suggested by our education specialists in an attempt to improve the education system of our country. The South African Schools Act (SASA,1996) and the Draft Policy Framework of Education Leadership and Management (2000) which guide educational managers in implementing decentralised management structures are some of these policies. I am convinced that teamwork and collaboration are some of the primary tools and approaches that can contribute to school effectiveness and the successful implementation of new policies during this era of transformation and instability in our education system.

The purpose of this literature review was to explore what different scholars in the education field have written about the concepts of teamwork and collaboration and also to identify any existing gaps so as to recommend further research on the subject. It was also to generate a conceptual framework within which data can be understood. However I have been selective in this literature review so as to stay focussed on the concepts and topics that have direct relevance to my study. In doing so I reviewed some of the international and local literature on teamwork and collaboration and to ascertain how they can impact on school effectiveness.

It is an undisputed fact that principals play a critical role in the success of schools. However the traditional tendency of regarding principals as solely responsible for the leadership and management of schools is gradually being replaced by the notion of distributed leadership. This entails the belief that leadership and management are the prerogative of many, if not all stakeholders within a learning organisation. This is evident in The Task Team`s Report on Education Management Development (Department of Education,1996) which calls for more collaborative ways in the

management of schools and also purports that management should be an activity in which all members of educational organisations should engage.

To explore my topic of teamwork and collaboration, I have organised the main arguments raised by different scholars around my three research questions. Firstly, I have sought to find answers to the question of how teamwork and collaboration are understood by teachers. Secondly, I explored the concepts of leadership and management and their relationship to the subject of teamwork and collaboration. The theoretical framework of distributed leadership and its related concept of teacher leadership have been touched on together with the factors that enhance and inhibit its successful implementation. I have also included a discussion on school effectiveness, which is one of the elements that stand out in my research topic and to navigate my way I viewed the transformational leadership approach as pertinent to my study as a perceived means to achieving school effectiveness. Finally, the other two elements which stand out in the title of my study, teamwork and collaboration are elaborated on and their impact on school effectiveness and then the conclusion are discussed. These themes have been chosen for their relevance to my study and the research questions.

## **2.2 Towards Defining Teamwork and Collaboration**

In an attempt to address the research question of what the teachers' perceptions and experiences of teamwork and collaboration are, I wish to focus my discussion on the concepts of teamwork and collaboration. School effectiveness is another aspect that was important in addressing my research questions. The South African education system is faced with numerous transformational initiatives which are embedded in the current educational policies and those of the country in general. For this transformation to be effective, all levels of the education sector have to work together. This notion is asserted by Phalane as cited in Mogotlane (2006, p.40) who states that "educators, SMTs and those in higher echelons in the Department of Education, will have to work together towards attaining the goals of education". Accordingly, a major step in the South African education system after 1994 has been its move towards more participation and collaboration in the practice of leadership and management of schools, The South African Schools Act (SASA) (1996) and the

Task Team Report on Education management Development (Department of Education,1996).

### **2.2.1 Teamwork**

As schools restructure and reform for the 21<sup>st</sup> century, educators are expected to work together in more ways, which is a view by Ferguson (2006). She further alludes that the challenges presented to schools by these reforms for which no single person possesses all the expertise, call for complementary skills from a group of individuals. Furthermore she opines that “only groups of teachers are likely to possess the wide range of information and skills really needed to work with today`s diverse groups of students” (p.5). I strongly share this sentiment as I, myself have experienced this diversity of learners in my own school which only teams of teachers can cope with. The diversity is characterised among others by language, culture, race, abilities as well as maturity levels of students. To confirm this, Armstrong`s (2005) definition of a team is that it is composed of a small number of people who possess skills that complement each other and who are committed to a common goal for which they are also accountable. Middlewood and Lumby (2005) have no straight forward definition of what a team is but they emphasise that teamwork is linked to distributed leadership, which I also believe. One cannot expect teamwork to flourish and be effective without the distribution of leadership to a number of people within an organisation. This is discussed in detail later in the chapter. Team practices help diminish the traditional practices of teachers working in isolation. Teams also outperform individuals who have limited effects on outcomes. The notion of teamwork is supported by authors such as Allman cited in Mercer, Barker and Bird (2010) and Bush and Middlewood (2005). They are of the opinion that team processes produce positive effects that could not be achieved by individuals acting alone. They further assert that to be a team means recognising each member`s contributions. For Mercer et al (2010), team members have a variety of expertise, skills, personalities and abilities that complement one another.

One can argue that teamwork is one of the approaches that schools can use to enhance their effectiveness. It can be regarded as an organisational development strategy that improves functionality and how an organisation responds to changes.

Katzenberg and Smith (2005, p.256) define a team as “a small number of people with complementary skills who are committed to a common purpose, performance goals and approach for which they hold themselves mutually accountable”. This definition is similar to the one mentioned earlier which proves that different authors have similar views on the concept of teamwork. Dealing with the complex task of transforming schools cannot be accomplished by one person single-handedly. There has to be a pool of skills and experiences from different individuals. In addition, it requires, as mentioned earlier a distributed form of leadership and flatter structures so that the best is obtained from the practice of teamwork. The definitions of teams provided earlier are specific about the composition of teams and the reasons for their existence. They underscore that it is important that team members should possess a range of skills so that they become effective. The existence of teams in schools is evidence that they are useful and they are an important feature of a school. In my observation as an HOD, I have seen working with a team of educators I am directly in charge of more effective than with the entire staff. Teachers are more free to voice their opinions within smaller groups.

I, myself ascribe to the notion of teamwork and collaboration. Engaging in teamwork helps me identify team members` strengths as well as those that need support and development in their work. One of the properties of teams as alluded by Bush and Middlewood (2005) is that of collective decision-making which according to them, enhances ownership of outcomes. This is in tandem with what Martens and Yarger (1998,p.4) advocate that “teaching will not be professionalised until teachers become more involved in making decisions that not only affect the classrooms but also their professional lives beyond the classrooms”. I believe this is what teamwork does, involving teachers but unfortunately most school leaders do not realise that. I believe teamwork is what is demanded in an environment of change such as South Africa.

Noteworthy, is the fact that team success does not come automatically but it requires a certain kind of organisational environment that will encourage working together and nurture team-working. This is what Bush and Middlewood cited in Wallace (2000, p.162) refer to as “a culture of teamwork”. Mercer et al (2010) state explicitly the organisational conditions that can help promote teamwork which include trust between leaders and followers. Group cohesion develops where there are high levels of trust and more can be achieved within such groups. Interestingly, trust

combined with a high degree of consensus can be detrimental to team effectiveness. Size is another factor to consider in the composition of teams. Larger teams can be difficult to manage and can be a source of conflict, so the advice will be to keep them small but as representative of the whole staff as possible. In my experience, it is easier to work with a smaller team which you can monitor but again this is determined by the size of the school. As mentioned earlier, the leadership style plays a crucial role in the effectiveness of a school. In this regard I have advocated for a transformational leadership style which I believe suits our South African context with all its reforms and innovations.

To this list, collegiality could be added as another condition that is conducive for teamwork and collaboration. This concerns mainly the culture of the teachers rather than that of the aspects of the school. The sentiment is shared by Shah cited in Fullan and Hargreaves (1991), Gossen and Anderson (1995) and Talford (1996) who all make a contention that high levels of collegiality among staff members are associated with successful and effective schools. Collegiality is defined as “co-operative relationships among colleagues” (Talford 1996, p.2) Further to that Shah citing Jarzabkowski (2002,p.3) defines this collegiality as “teachers` involvement with their peers on any level, be it intellectual, moral, political social or emotional”. For her “collegiality encompasses both professional and social interactions in the workplace”. In Lieberman and Miller`s (1999) words, collegiality is the quality and impact of professional relationships whereby teachers openly and continually investigate and critique school/classroom practice with a view to improvement. Accordingly, Fullan (1991) perceives collegiality as a fruitful teacher development strategy. I agree with all these definitions and they appeal to me as they are consistent with the notion of teamwork. I therefore strongly believe that collegiality is essential for school improvement and its success. Within such conditions, I feel teamwork will definitely thrive.

As mentioned earlier, teams do not automatically become successful and effective. They go through certain stages of development which have an impact on how they perform. Mercer et al citing Tuckman (1965) outline the different stages for team development and group formation as: the forming stage, whereby the group is formed and members come together and develop relationships with each other. I would equate this stage to when group members meet each other for the first time

either by being elected into that group or committee, as we normally refer to them in our schools, or a member can just volunteer. Sometimes the membership is automatic, this is to say, like a teacher will automatically become a member of a team within that phase which is headed by a respective HOD. Then follows the storming stage. Tuckman (1965) holds that within this stage, the group establishes its identity. Members assume different roles and positions to hold within the group or committee which may include the chairperson, the secretary, the treasurer depending on what has to be done within that particular group. The next stage, the norming stage is when the group begins to function according to its set rules or constitution as we sometimes say. Finally, the group reaches its performing stage wherein its members become active in their roles and the group begins to show some confidence because of the experience they have had within the group. Results begin to show and the team effectiveness becomes more. However, it is noteworthy that in practice, this process does not happen. In my own experience, this team development process is what lacks in making our teams as effective as they should be. I can therefore argue that if teams could be exposed to such development, a lot could be achieved through them. Sometimes teams are formed with a particular intention but they merely cease to exist because of lack of teamwork skills. If this was the actual case, then teams will be so powerful. This reveals the gap that exists between what literature says and what actually happens, the theory is there but practically it doesn't happen. In my own experience, this team development process is what lacks in making our teams as effective as they should be. I can therefore argue that if teams could be exposed to such development, a lot could be achieved through them.

Writing on teamwork, Bush and Middlewood citing Belbin (1993) who developed the team roles, sound a cautionary note that for successful teams, a mix of diverse characters and personality types has to be considered when forming teams. Simply put, for teams to be effective and successful, there has to be the right mix of people put together in that group. In Belbin's (1993) words, "what is needed is not well balanced individuals, but individuals who balance well with each other" (p.19). Further to that he provides a clear classification of the three different categories into which team roles fall as action-oriented, people-oriented and cerebral roles. The names of these categories tell what kinds of roles are associated with each one of

them so that each member of the team gets allocated to a role according to their abilities, skills and strengths. Also this helps avoid a clash of roles and ensures that the team has the right mix of people for it to achieve the intended goals. This allocation of roles, I believe enhances distributed as well as teacher leadership which are the conceptual frameworks that underpinned my study. It also promotes collaboration among team members as they perform their different tasks. The interpersonal relationships among staff members are also strengthened which inevitably influence the school's professional culture. I want to focus some attention to one of the three categories I mentioned earlier, into which team roles are classified. This category stands out for me and I believe is important in our schools in general and in teams in particular but unfortunately it is the most lacking. People within this category are those that can solve difficult problems and can also provide rare knowledge and skills to the group. The other categories are also essential for team effectiveness but I feel not as much as the cerebral roles.

The different types of teams are another aspect of teamwork that literature has which I feel is relevant to my study. The types of teams together with their functions are explored. Bush and Middlewood (2005) advocate that teams provide professional means to respond to the pace of change, which I strongly agree with. The most popular teams in our South African schools are the school management teams (SMTs) which are mandated by legislation. Their composition depends on the size of the school. Mercer et al (2010) speak of faculty teams which are responsible for leading subject functions in a school. At a school level, I can equate this faculty team to a subject committee as is popularly known. The process management or cross-functional teams are established to improve current processes. In a school situation we have a school development team (SDT) which does the same function as the cross-functional team. These teams bring together people with knowledge, skills and experience in particular areas to deal with problems. Middlewood and Lumby (1998) speak of statutory teams. These are teams such as the school governing body (SGB) and the students' representative councils (SRCs). Standing teams are responsible for day to day activities of the school such as teaching and learning. These I can argue are the school management teams (SMTs). A project or task team is formulated specifically to solve a particular problem within a specific period of time thereafter it can be dismantled. To this team, people with interest and experience are

elected by management or they can volunteer their services based on the expertise they possess. This type of team is very rare in our schools as issues are usually dealt with by the school management team. In addition to these types of teams, we have technical teams. These are most common in the business world and their duty is to set standards and give support to other teams to ensure the smooth functioning of work takes place. I now move to the advantages and disadvantages of using teams.

### **2.2.2 Advantages and Disadvantages of Teamwork**

“Teams are not the solution to everyone’s current and future organisational needs, neither do they solve every problem nor help top management address every performance challenge”, Bush and Middlewood (2005, p.125). Middlewood further asserts that teamwork epitomises the essential values of our democratic South Africa. This is what some of the advocates of teamwork have to say, which proves one cannot solely rely on teamwork for school improvement and effectiveness and that it has its weaker side. They further warn that teamwork is not a panacea for all school problems. I will start with some of the disadvantages which literature highlights. It is reported that teamwork may result in an added burden to the teachers as it requires time and effort. Teachers have to be engaged in meetings and group discussions which appear to be an additional load to their normal functions. Teachers also point to the loss of their autonomy as well as pressure to conform with the group which compromises their independence. I have had an experience of these disadvantages myself, especially with the group of teachers I am directly in charge of as an HOD. However, I believe and in my experience that the advantages to the use of teamwork far outperform the disadvantages.

One of the most important advantage of teamwork is that, “teams outperform individuals who act alone”, Middlewood cited in Katzenbach and Smith (1998, p.9). More can be achieved by teachers working together in teams with the pool of expertise available than when they work as individuals. I, myself can attest to the fact that teams encourage teacher learning. Teachers get an opportunity to learn from each other. Problems which they encounter in their classrooms can be shared and resolved within teams. Furthermore, teamwork improves teacher morale through collegial support they receive from each other as they work. This, consequently

impacts on their performance and inevitably on the learner outcomes. I believe teamwork also impacts on school effectiveness which is another important aspect of my study. I now turn my attention to the second important element of my study, collaboration.

### **2.3 Collaboration**

The changing demographics in our country present new challenges in every aspect of society including schools. After 1994, public school learner populations became culturally diverse. This also includes the teachers. Collaboration has since become one of the most critical skills for teachers and all educational professionals at different levels. When teachers collaborate, they engage in sharing of ideas, developing each other, discussing new materials and giving each other moral support. According to Harris (2004), when teachers collaborate in their teams they are capable of producing the best possible solutions to their problems. There is thus a clear correlation between students' achievement, leadership and effective schools. The absence of any one of these, impacts negatively on others. A collaborative effort is essential, Greenlee (2002). Meirink et al (2010) also assert that collaboration is interdependent and its main aims are improvement and professional development, which I also believe in. During the collaboration process, teachers learn new ideas of tackling their problems by interacting with others which inevitably improves their performance.

Furthermore, it is important to note that collaboration is not an initiative that is limited to teachers within a school context. It can well be extended to other schools as teachers from different schools network. In our South African context, we have levels of management which are demarcated according to regions, districts, circuits and wards. Schools that fall within a ward are usually within close proximity from each other. Those schools then form clusters so as to be able to network with each other. They work together and give support to each other in most aspects of the school. Ainscow, Muijs and West (2006), in their study recommend the use of collaboration between schools as a strategy to support those schools which are facing difficult and challenging circumstances. The problems facing schools can range from the location of the school itself, learner and teacher diversity as well as linguistic problems. As a

teacher in a multi-racial school, I have personally experienced most of these problems, whereby the linguistic related issues are most prominent. Parental attitudes, their involvement or lack thereof in their children`s education can be added to this list of problems that require high levels of collaboration. These clusters of schools are sometimes referred to in the literature as collaboratives or cluster partnerships. In our ward we do have clusters but they are only symbolic, not much happens within them in terms of helping each other.

Evidence from their study, Ainscow, Muijs and West (2006) shows that schools in these partnerships helped each other by sharing resources, both physical and human as a means to offer support and develop capacity to the struggling schools. Teachers were moved and loaned to other schools to fill the gaps. I am convinced that collaboration can be a powerful tool that schools can use in their development and I believe this is what is demanded in our South African context that is undergoing changes. I have also witnessed teachers being loaned to other schools. It is the right move, especially if the intentions are good but it can bring more problems than solutions, especially if it is not correctly done. Caution is given about the possible disadvantages as well as advantages of the implementation of this strategy. It is noted that because of the social complexity involved in the process, it can be time consuming. The loaning of teachers may not be welcome by other members of staff, either from where the teacher is loaned to where the teacher is moved because of several factors ranging from strong unionism and the micro politics that exist in our schools. All these can defeat the good cause of collaboration.

On the other hand, collaboration is seen to be beneficial to schools. Engaging in collaborative initiatives and joint courses widens curricular opportunities through the sharing of resources. Teachers and schools in collaborative environments acquire skills that they would not have had individually which helps capacitate them to respond to learner diversity, Ainscow et al (2006). Partnerships are also created which impact on social relationships. I perceive collaboration as a form of professional development. As teachers interact, they gain skills from others which they would not have had. I, myself have experienced the benefits of collaborating with the teachers within my school as well as with other schools. When teachers work together, they achieve more which consequently impacts on learner

achievement. I now move to a discussion of leadership and management in education.

#### **2.4 Towards Defining Leadership and Management**

One cannot put the concepts of teamwork and collaboration into perspective without an understanding of educational leadership and management and how these relate to school effectiveness. Despite the multitude of policies that have been introduced to improve our education system, the legacy of apartheid, especially in the management of schools still exists. It is therefore pivotal to ascertain what the status quo of leadership and management in our schools is and use that as a backdrop for our discussion. The literature reviewed makes some connection between leadership and teamwork, and for this reason I found such a discussion relevant to my study. In my view, teamwork and collaboration are hardly achievable without the support of the school management teams (SMTs) in our schools. There is thus a clear relational path between teamwork and collaboration, as asserted by Phalane (2011). He further cites Steyn (2007) who argues that, traditionally, only top managers can make decisions and that staff is expected to be receptive and implement those decisions without any questioning. This ideology is asserted by Grant and Singh (2009, p.289) in their study who challenge the South African style of leadership in schools and argue that, “the educational system can no longer be characterized by a hierarchical and bureaucratic style of management”. Similarly, the key ideas as suggested by the Task Team Report on Education Management Development (Department of Education, 1996, p.8) clearly stipulate that “management should not be seen as being the task of the few, it should be seen as an activity in which all members of educational organisations engage”. It goes on to say, “management is about doing things and working with people to make things happen. As such, it is a process to which all contribute and in which everyone in an organisation ought to be involved”, however these suggestions seem to be in vain because of what actually goes on in the schools. Management is only the preserve of a few individuals who occupy formal leadership positions. I suggest that for the South African education system to improve, it requires transformational leaders who understand what it means to be a leader in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The authors further argue that a democratic form of leadership leads to distributed leadership which recognises that all teachers are leaders irrespective of any formal leadership positions they may/ may not hold. I

view both leadership and management as essential in any school for it to be effective and more so, as much as there is a distinction between the two concepts, in practice, it is the same people who manage who also lead or vice versa. Bush (2006, p. 2) argues that “leadership and management need to be given equal prominence if schools are to operate effectively and achieve their objectives”. He further asserts that the two concepts are “practical activities”, which indeed they are. Morrison (1998, p.205) suggests that leadership and management are not “an either or situation”. Similarly, Lang, Davidoff and Lazarus (1997, p.32) argue that “it is important to note that leadership and management are closely associated functions which cannot be attended to separately” and Grant (2003) to prove that, refers to them as “two sides of the same coin”. While she believes leadership and management work together, she still makes a clear distinction between the functions which are applicable to each one of them.

- Leadership provides guidance while management is about co-ordinating
- Leadership initiates activities at the school while management is responsible for the maintenance of routine operations

It is common that leadership and management be used interchangeably though their meanings differ. Bush (2006) says they are `distinct`. It is this distinction that I will discuss and it is to the concept of leadership that I now turn.

#### **2.4.1 Leadership**

Literature on leadership both locally and internationally is so vast but for the purposes of my study, I have been very selective and only reviewed that which I perceive as pertinent to my study. For Donaldson (2006,p.7), leadership is a process that brings change in an organisation and “mobilizes members to think, believe and behave in a manner that satisfies emerging organisational needs or wants or the status quo”. Bush (2006) regards leadership as composed of higher order tasks whose main objective is the improvement of students, staff and the entire school. He further asserts that it is about influencing others` actions so as to achieve desirable goals. Grobler, Carrel, Warnich, Elbert and Hatfield (2006) are of the opinion that organisations are over-managed and under-led which I also agree with. In my experience I have noticed that principals always strive to maintain what already

exists which Bush (2006) terms 'routine maintenance'. Very little effort is put into trying to improve schools. I suppose this is also supported by policies and the very existence of a national curriculum for our country leaves principals with very limited scope to decide on their own educational goals. They are expected to work on what has been prescribed for the school and only modify it. People in charge in different organisations are referred to as managers, even our own learning organisations we have school managers, school management teams (SMTs). I believe this unintentionally promotes the task of management rather than leadership. As the schools restructure and reform for the 21<sup>st</sup> century, one would expect that even the management teams in our schools would change to school management and leadership teams to denote an all-encompassing role for those who are in charge. Traditionally, leadership has been synonymous with position but that is slowly changing. Ash and Persall (2000) opine that leadership is not role-specific nor reserved for administrators but it is the duty of the school leader to provide opportunities for staff so that they also develop into productive leaders. The lack of leadership training makes them resort to their own experience as a guide to action. This is confirmed by Bush (2006) when he states that "dependence on personal experience in interpreting facts and making decisions is narrow", (p.3). He suggests theory as relevant to good practice but this is not possible unless leaders are trained in that. Bush, Kiggundu and Moorosi cite Mathibe (2007, p.523) who says that South African principals "are not appropriately skilled and trained for school management and leadership".

The era for dictatorship and authoritarian leadership which was practised by leaders in the past has expired. Leaders need to embrace and move towards a more democratic leadership style. For leaders to realise that need, they need to be dynamic and one of the strategies to achieve this is through life-long learning. As leaders engage in life-long learning, they can tap into hidden potential, Grant (2003). The author further warns that leadership challenges are unique and therefore there is no blueprint that guides leaders as to what to do. Each situation they encounter has to be handled differently. Bush (2006) asserts that there is no single all-embracing theory of educational management partly because of the diversity in our schools. Grant (2003) advises the current leaders of our schools to try and "let go of old ideas about leadership" if they want to develop their leadership capacities (p.7).

According to her the ideas that keep leaders trapped in the past include firstly, the belief that leadership is about keeping control. She states that the ultimate reason people got promoted in the past was not because of their leadership capacities but simply because “they were willing to co-operate in implementing apartheid policies in schools”. The situation has changed for other reasons now. I believe and have observed nowadays that as long as one is an active member of a powerful union, they are guaranteed promotion, regardless of the leadership potential or skills. This has had a negative impact on schools` effectiveness and ultimately learner achievement. This view is echoed by Phalane citing Ejimofor (2000,p.10) who states that “the incompetency of SMT with no induction programme conducted when they were appointed, principals who were appointed on the basis of nepotism, favouritism by trade unions, also contribute to poor performance”. I believe like Spillane (2004) that for any successful innovations, leadership has a critical role to play. People in leadership positions tend to focus more on technical and bureaucratic functions of leadership and ignore the skills of vision building, teambuilding and transforming our schools into learning organisations. This, I have observed in my years of teaching experience that so much emphasis is placed on securing positions rather than school improvement. People in formal leadership positions are so obsessed with being recognised for the positions they hold rather than the expertise and capabilities they contribute towards school improvement and effectiveness.

Secondly, for Grant (2003), the tendency of leaders seeing problems as external or `out there` as she puts it, still persists as in the past. Every challenge they (leaders) encounter is seen to have its source somewhere else rather than within them. For this reason it is suggested that a critical self reflection be done by them. Finally, the perception that schools are rigid, fixed institutions needs to be undone for real transformation to take place. Schools need to be regarded as dynamic organisations and leaders need to support that ideology by inspiring all stakeholders to tap into their full potential. As mentioned earlier, all this is not possible without the appropriate skills and training for SMTs and school principals in particular.

Leaders also need to develop their leadership potential. As the author holds that “leadership means having a holistic perspective”,(2003, p.14). This means that leaders need to understand that a school operates as a system which has different components that constitute a whole. Each of these components has a direct impact

on the effective functioning of the school. Leaders need to see challenges as learning opportunities that can offer a deeper meaning into the problem rather than taking problems as personal attacks. It is so unfortunate that the latter happens. Sergiovanni (2001) echoes this view when he states that dealing with the complexities of this world requires teachers and administrators to practise leadership that is less based on their personalities, their positions and mandates but more on ideas. If our schools could have these kinds of leaders, I believe more could be achieved.

Grant, (2003) further states that being a leader means understanding and acknowledging the needs and contributions of others. This leadership principle appeals to me as I believe that staff involvement impacts on their job satisfaction. Most interestingly is that leadership entails modelling the way. This simply means that what one believes in and says is consistent with what one does, leaders need to walk the talk. As mentioned earlier, the dearth of leadership training for principals and SMTs leaves them with nothing but to model what they experienced from their own principals, Manuel (2012). This speaks to our own South African scenario which most if not all schools experience. What Grant (2003) and many other authors opine about leadership is so true and I also share the sentiment that if more focus could be put on leadership in terms of training and development, the rest will fall into place. I believe that leadership plays a crucial role in educational transformation but as Bush (2006) advocates, also attention to the structures and processes for successful implementation of this desired leadership needs to be given. The next section discusses a selection of ideas about management.

#### **2.4.2 Management**

Management is a process of having chageship over a certain group of people. For Davidoff and Lazarus (1999,p.66) management is understood as “holding the school, establishing certainty, confidence and security, and allowing for rest and reflection, and making sure that the school, as a whole is functioning effectively and achieving its vision”. To me, this sounds so much like leadership. Bush (2006, p.2) sees management as “routine maintenance of present operations` and `maintaining efficiently and effectively current organisational arrangements”. I view management as dealing with what already exists rather than new innovations. Bush (2008, p.1)

further defines management as “an executive function for carrying out agreed policy”. I would therefore argue that since South Africa has a standard national curriculum for all its schools, the duty of schools, in particular the SMTs is more of management than leadership. Furthermore, I feel management reinforces the hierarchical structures in schools. This is in line with what Grant (2008) theorises when she makes a distinction between leadership and management and states that while leadership assists in the forward movement of an organisation, management, on the other hand establishes parameters. It also sets boundaries which with strong leadership can be broken. Christie (2001, pp3-4) distinguishes between leadership and management in this way:

- Leadership involves the exercise of influence over others while management can take place outside as well as inside formal organisations
- Leadership in schools is not the preserve of any position, and thus can be found and built throughout the school.
- Management in contrast to leadership relates to structures and processes by which organisations meet their goals and central purposes.
- Leaders operate through influence while managers operate through compulsion, as well as consent and influence.
- Leaders may influence followers to take any direction, managers are bound by primary tasks of the organisation, and their success or failure is judged in terms of these.
- Leaders have a responsibility towards followers while managers have a responsibility of meeting organisational goals.

No matter what the distinctions are, leadership and management, as mentioned earlier need to be given equal prominence as different situations and times call for different responses, Bush (2006). They are both required for effective functioning of our schools. Principals and SMTs should be competent in both management as well as leadership skills. The next section explores the theoretical framework of distributed leadership and the complementary concept of teacher leadership which underpinned my study.

## **2.5 Distributed Leadership**

The concept of leadership cannot be over-emphasised in the effective functioning of our schools. South Africa needs a type of leadership that is consistent with many changes that are taking place in its education system. Leadership that will embrace the change processes and be supportive of all other initiatives of transforming our schools into better places for teaching and learning. I view distributed leadership as such a model which our school leaders need to adopt. Distributed leadership can be conceptualised as “an emergent property of a group or network of individuals in which group members pool their expertise”, Gronn (2000, p.324). According to this definition, the notion of distributed leadership works well with the idea of teamwork. It also incorporates the “redistribution of power”, Grant (2010, p.57) and “the capacity to relinquish, so that the latent, creative powers of teachers can be released”, Barth (1998, p.640). Muijs and Harris (2003) suggest that distributing leadership means giving teachers opportunities to lead and take responsibility within their organisations. I believe, like Gronn (2000) that the time for this form of leadership has come, whereby teachers take on responsibilities once reserved for people in formal leadership positions.

Involving teachers in leadership, I believe makes them feel part of the school as they feel they can contribute something to its functioning. Harris (2004) opines that distributed leadership has its focus on expertise rather than a formal position. Sadly, that is not the case in our schools, the opposite happens. People who hold formal leadership positions are the ones who are expected and allowed to lead even in areas they are not good in. Because of the perceived overload that school contexts present to educators as well as SMTs, I feel schools need a leadership model that is inclusive but at the same time does not compromise the core business of the school, which is teaching and learning. Grant (2008), like The Task Team Report on Education Management Development (Department of Education,1996) and other authors believe that management is a shared process that should involve all stakeholders.

For this type of leadership to flourish, it needs to thrive in a supportive environment where collegiality, communication, collaboration and questioning are embraced by all. Grant (2008) also suggests professional development for educators as a crucial element for the take up of this leadership initiative. The distribution of leadership can result in leadership being found at all levels of the school rather than being present

only for those at the apex of the hierarchy. I am convinced that this type of leadership is what is demanded in a transforming country like ours so as to speed up the change process by not only relying on those in formal leadership positions to bring change. Gunter (2005) takes the concept of distributed leadership further by characterising it into three different categories. These include authorised, dispersed as well as the democratic types of distributed leadership. Of these three, the democratic type appeals to me as it speaks directly to my study of teamwork and collaboration since it has a focus on group and collaborative actions. This type has the goals and values of the school as its integral part. These are some of the reasons I ascribe to this form of distributed leadership because of its focus on collective actions and networks which are some of the features of teamwork.

Spillane's (2005) study on distributed leadership emphasises the importance of "acknowledging the contributions of all individuals in a school and that principals alone cannot single-handedly lead schools to greatness", (p.143). An array of individuals with complementary skills has the potential to transform schools into better places where quality teaching and learning can be offered. He further refers to distributed leadership by using terms such as shared leadership, team leadership and democratic leadership interchangeably. Interactions among leaders, followers and their situations are also emphasised. Interdependency is viewed as of utmost importance during interactions of leaders. This again, I can argue speaks to the collaboration part of my study. It finally appears that distributed leadership places much emphasis on teams rather than individuals. Timperly's (2005) contention that the successful transformation of schools does not lie with exceptional or heroic leaders, has proven the idea of a distributed model as a useful one. Consistent with the distributed leadership orientation is the concept of teacher leadership which I now turn to.

## **2.6 Teacher Leadership**

"Expert teachers, who spend the majority of their time in the classroom but take on leadership roles at times when development and innovation is needed", is how Grant cited in Harris and Lambert (2003, p.44) define teacher leaders. The concept of teacher leadership is further defined by her in a South African context as a form of leadership beyond headship or formal position. It refers to teachers becoming aware

of and taking up informal and formal leadership roles both in the classroom and beyond. It includes “teachers working collaboratively with all stakeholders towards a shared and dynamic vision of their school within a culture of fairness, inclusion, mutual respect and trust”, Grant (2008,p.88). Teacher leadership as a notion that is embedded in the distributed leadership theoretical framing, began to show in our official documentation of our education system after 1994. Grant`s (2006) definition of the concept of teacher leadership has an emphasis on informal leadership which is asserted by Ntuzela (2008). He believes that teacher leadership should be extended beyond formal leadership so that teachers are afforded opportunities to lead outside the confines of the classroom. This, he feels could only be achieved if SMTs can devolve some powers to the teachers and move away from top-down, hierarchical approaches of leadership. I also share this sentiment and further believe that if teachers can be entrusted with leadership, their self esteem can improve which inevitably impacts on their job satisfaction as well as their performance.

Muijs and Harris (2003) take the notion of teacher leadership a step further. Theorising from a critical perspective, they suggest a number of leadership roles that teacher leaders can engage in, cited in Katzenmeyer and Moller, (2001). They also categorise teacher leadership into three. I believe this is useful to any teacher who has interest in the taking up so that they know exactly what they are getting themselves into and also to choose those roles that best suit them in as far as abilities are concerned. Firstly, there is leadership of students or other teachers. This could mean being a facilitator, a mentor to both students and teachers and leading curriculum matters. In my experience, especially with teamwork, this includes subject heads, conveners for different committees that exist at the school, we also have a teacher in charge of the prefects who does not hold a formal leadership position but is good in that. Operational tasks involve maintaining order in the school so that its goals are achieved with ease. We have a disciplinary committee with one of the level one teachers as its head who deals with disciplinary matters at the school. Finally, we have leadership that deals with school partnerships. Partnerships with parents, the community and business people. All these partnerships are necessary in the school for different purposes like fund-raising, the school`s safety and security. For all these roles there is someone at the school that is good in that particular role.

I find Muijs and Harris (2003) discussion on teacher leadership very persuasive, it makes the reader want to buy into the ideology of teacher leadership when they highlight its benefits to schools. Several authors are cited as saying “distributing a larger proportion of current leadership to teachers would have a positive influence on teacher effectiveness and student engagement”, (Leithwood&Jantzi1998, p.61). Katzenmeyer and Moller (2001) and Ovando (1996) all found that teachers` self-esteem and job satisfaction are enhanced through the take up of leadership roles. Accordingly, O`Connor and Boles (1992) reported about teachers having improved their confidence and attitude towards teaching as well as gaining more knowledge. Literature on teacher leadership is clear about its benefits to schools which include among others, increased collaboration among teachers, increased responsibility and the transformation of schools into learning organisations. I also ascribe to the notion of teacher leadership and have a strong belief that it can really transform our schools for the better.

Muijs and Harris citing Katzenmeyer and Moller (2001), Little (1995) and Magee (1995) also reveal some disadvantages of teacher leadership as they state that teachers who take up leadership roles suffer being isolated by their colleagues and do not receive any support from them. This is supported by Harris citing Barth (1988), who contends that colleagues can be hostile to teacher leaders. Similarly, Troen and Boles (1994) confirm that teachers feel less connected to their peers when they engage in leadership roles. It also appears that teachers who take up leadership roles expect some form of remuneration as they regard this as an extra job to them, Muijs and Harris (2003). I believe teachers need to be motivated and encouraged by SMTs to perform leadership duties beyond their classrooms. In addition, as mentioned earlier, they need some form of development to empower them to engage confidently in teacher leadership.

Surprisingly, one other barrier to the take up of teacher leadership is the SMT itself. Little (1995) found that the success of teacher leadership in any school is dependent upon whether the SMT is able to relinquish power to the teachers. I strongly agree with this statement and I can attest to how clinging on to power by the formal leaders inhibits the take up of teacher leadership. For teacher leadership to flourish, heads must be willing to accept leadership from those who are not part of them. I feel teachers need to be part of decisions on what leadership roles they can take up

rather than them being imposed to them. I can refer to that, as discussed earlier, as a democratic type of distribution of leadership. Support must also be offered to those who are willing and their contributions be valued. Ash and Persall (2000) argue that in schools where strong hierarchical structures exist, teachers do not feel wanted and often resort to working in isolation. The South African scenario is that leadership is still vested in those who hold formal leadership positions with its policies unintentionally supporting that kind of situation. I believe, as mentioned earlier that this is attributed to the lack of leadership training for SMTs. I like Grant's (2006) contention that schools need to develop a culture that recognises that all teachers can lead and move away from the assumption that only people in formal leadership positions are leaders. If our schools, especially SMTs can develop such a mindset, a lot can be achieved in schools and this is consistent with the notion of teamwork.

Time is another factor that has been proved to inhibit the effective implementation of teacher leadership in schools. Echoing this assumption are Katzenmeyer and Moller (2001), who state that time demands make it difficult for teacher leaders to be full time class teachers and also exercise leadership roles. To alleviate the problem, Muijs and Harris (2003) suggest that time be set aside for these teacher leaders so that they are able to perform these leadership tasks without them interfering with their normal duties. They cite Ovando (1990) who concurs with this opinion that teacher leaders need to be 'freed up' so they can perform leadership roles. In addition, Muijs and Harris (2007) study identified reluctance by the teachers themselves to take up any leadership roles as a huge barrier to teacher leadership. This was due to the lack of confidence and the traditional way of thinking that leadership is the preserve of those in formal positions and has nothing to do with them. They create a barrier for themselves which I feel is no surprise because traditionally, in our South African context and the context where I teach, the concept of leadership has to do with position. As Grant (2005) asserts that in South Africa, leadership is normally associated with formal leadership positions. I therefore believe that until teachers are prepared and empowered to take up these leadership roles, even if opportunities may present themselves, they will not be ready to do so.

I also believe that teacher leadership is really a good idea but a lot of time must be invested in training our teachers so that they understand it and they are ready for the take up so that schools can truly benefit from it. Sadly, many schools are not well

developed in terms of leadership and they cannot realise the need and importance of this teacher leadership. They still believe in leadership by the principal and SMT. School effectiveness is another important element of my study, so I found it an essential part of my discussion since my topic seeks to understand the relationship that may exist between the two concepts of teamwork and collaboration and school effectiveness. It is to that discussion that I now turn.

## **2.7 School Effectiveness, what is it all about?**

Most literature on school effectiveness does not leave out school improvement. That is why you find authors like Coleman (2003) referring to them as `twin concepts`. We cannot fully explore my subject of teamwork and collaboration without a discussion on school effectiveness because my topic sought to find out what their impact on school effectiveness was. Coleman (2003,p.118) defines school effectiveness as “all theories and research studies concerning the means-ends relationships between educational processes and outcomes, in particular students knowledge and skills aiming at explanations for differences in student achievements between schools and classrooms”, as cited in Creemers and Reezigt (1997,p.140). Simply put, school effectiveness looks at how a school`s characteristics impact on learner achievement. In further explaining what school effectiveness is, comparisons in progress between different schools are made and what counts for that progress. Coleman (2003), one of the advocates of school effectiveness writes about the characteristics by which to identify schools which are deemed as effective. She lists a firm and purposeful leadership which is also participative, an orderly atmosphere with an attractive learning and working environment, fair discipline for both learners and staff, a school-based staff development, instructional leadership, a sound home-school relationship with high levels of parental involvement, a shared vision and goals. I fully ascribe to all these characteristics but there is one particular one that stands out to me. That one about leadership, I strongly believe, as I have pointed out previously that leadership is the key to the success of our schools. This I attribute to my experience as a teacher in a number of contexts. The author does not explain if there is any particular order these characteristics have been listed but to me they look like they have been placed in their order of importance.

For Sammons, Hillman and Mortimore (1995), professional leadership is critical for school effectiveness. Citing Purky and Smith (1983), in their study, they concluded that to initiate and maintain any school improvement activities, leadership is an essential ingredient. Sammons et al (1995) further explained firm leadership to have a focus on the leader as being proactive, a concentration on careful selection and replacement of staff and the importance of having consensus and unity of purpose with the SMT. This is an area I feel our schools lack in and sometimes it is not their fault but the policies that have been introduced that end up having a negative impact on the schools` functionality and effectiveness. In addition, firm leadership requires that the leader forms strong contacts with external agencies so as to secure additional resources for the school. Effective leadership also requires, as mentioned earlier in the chapter that leaders share leadership responsibilities, not only with the SMT but extend it to the rest of the staff as distributed leadership advocates. I have observed with concern that school principals are reluctant to share leadership even with the very SMT. This I believe robs the schools of the many capabilities that teachers possess which can contribute to school effectiveness.

Finally, effective leadership involves being a leading professional. What this means is, having a focus on the core business of the school, teaching and learning. An effective leader is an instructional leader. The processes of teaching and learning must be monitored using workable monitoring instruments. Teachers need support by means of internal staff development programmes and improvement plans. Certainly, the role of leadership is indeed a critical one for school improvement and effectiveness. Silins and Mulford (2002) opine that for school effectiveness and improvement, good relationships between teachers and the SMT should prevail. I am of the opinion, like Muijs and Harris (2003) that the involvement of teachers in decision-making makes them feel ownership of the school and ultimately leads to school improvement and effectiveness. For leaders to be able to embrace teamwork and collaboration in schools which in my view, if implemented effectively, can be powerful tools for dealing with some of the challenges that our schools are faced with, a certain type of leadership is suggested. This is the transformational leadership style which I now turn to, to discuss.

## **2.8 Transformational Leadership, a means to School Effectiveness**

Principals nowadays are faced with so many challenges in terms of school leadership due to the changing educational environment which comes as a result of the reforms that are introduced to schools such as a shift to school-based management and many others. As leaders, they need to understand and manage this change so that it does not impact badly on the school's functionality and progress. Against this backdrop, I believe transformational leadership may provide solutions to some of these challenges. For Sergiovanni (1990, p.24) transformational leadership is when "leaders and followers are united in pursuit of higher levels for both. Both want to become the best, both want to shape the school in a new direction". Senge (1990) on talking about transformational leadership, states that it creates a conducive environment which enables schools to become learning organisations.

Covey citing Homrig (2001) provides a useful list of the behaviours for transformational leaders. Developing and sharing an inspiring vision of where the organisation is moving towards is one of these behaviours expected from a transformational leader. One has to value individuals as well as teams and modelling the type of behaviour that is expected may help the organisation develop into a moving school. These leaders invest in developing themselves and others. Investing in their development appeals to me because without development, the school will turn into a stuck school. I like the way Steyn (2011, p.51) puts it, he suggests that, "principals need to be in touch with their teachers, identify their shortcomings and see where they can plant and plough in them (teachers)". Unfortunately, that is not the case in our schools due to the fact that there are line functions and the hierarchical structures which are endorsed by our departmental policies. In my observation, in the context where I teach and in many other schools, principals are so detached from the teachers, especially in instructional matters. They entrust such roles to the HODs, and the people who are aware of the teachers' shortcomings are them (the HODs) because they work closely with the teachers. The principal becomes an overseer.

I suggest this disqualifies such principals from becoming leading professionals, as suggested earlier in the chapter by literature on school effectiveness. In South Africa, and many other countries, for one to qualify for a principalship position, only a teaching qualification and teaching experience are the requirements, there is no

specific preparation needed, as suggested by Bush, Kiggundu and Moorosi (2011). A transformational leader realises the need for distributing leadership without fear of losing control. This is only possible within an environment of trust and collegiality. Finally, where a transformistic culture prevails, leadership and followership are based less on positional authority, rather there is interdependence between leaders and followers centred around a common goal. This kind of behaviour from transformational leadership appeals to me but unfortunately it is less evident in our schools. To this list could be added that transformational leaders, as suggested in The Norms and Standards for Educators (2000) become life-long learners as they want to keep abreast of their followers with regards to latest developments and innovations that take place in our education sector.

Further to the behaviours listed by Covey (2007), Cheng (1997) proffers his opinion on the subject. He states that transformational leadership is a complex, multi-functional process which includes five dimensions of leadership namely: technical leadership which assists in providing support in the planning, co-ordination and organisation of learning activities. Technical leaders have competencies in the division of labour, allocation of resources and proper channels of communication. In my experience, these are duties reserved for the SMT which in my opinion, disregard the notion of teacher leadership as well as distributed leadership whereby one performs tasks based on expertise and not position. Even though technical leadership is important since it ensures effectiveness, it cannot function on its own. Human leadership, which arises from a human resource perspective, has a focus on individuals and teams who, for their effectiveness are motivated by social needs. They do coaching, mentoring and training. This is a very rare type of leadership in our schools. Political leadership emanates from the politics among interest groups which may compete over power or allocation of resources. Politics will always be present where there are groups of people. In one of the chapters of this dissertation it is cited as a barrier to teamwork. Cultural leaders inspire their followers through charisma. Cheng cites Sergiovanni (1990) who describes these leaders as assuming the role of a `chief` or `high priest` and they give the school its unique identity. They are also able to build a collegial culture for their schools which in my opinion is conducive for teamwork and collaboration. Hopkins (2001) asserts that collegial

relations and collective practice, which I can term teamwork, are essential for school improvement.

Finally, if our leaders could possess these traits, then they qualify to be termed transformational leaders, who then can be able to move our schools to greater heights. This is the leadership model that appeals to me which I believe can be a solution to most if not all challenges faced by the schools. However, I must warn that the ball is in the leaders' court to engage in quality leadership training programmes and life-long learning that will empower them to offer effective leadership to schools.

## **2.9 Conclusion**

In this chapter I have discussed literature that pertains to my study. Firstly, I explored the concepts of leadership and management which I believe are fundamental to every educational study. Teamwork and collaboration, the two elements that stand out in the topic of my study were also explored. I then proceeded to the theoretical framework of distributed leadership and its complementary concept of teacher leadership which helped me locate my study as suggested by Vithal and Jansen (2007). School effectiveness is another element of my topic that I discussed and the different views on it were explored. Finally, I turned my focus to the concept of transformational leadership as a suggested means to school effectiveness.

This literature review has attempted to respond to my research questions by looking at what various scholars say on each topic selected. It is evident from literature that, in South Africa, in particular, the policies that are introduced are not fully realised, either because of lack of expertise from the leaders or because they (policies) are not clear enough as to how they should be implemented. As Jansen (2002, p.200) argues that there is "evidence for understanding the policy-practice gap through the lens of political symbolism". He further suggests that South Africa is fascinated with new policies but less emphasis is placed on how these policies should be implemented. I can attest to that, sometimes there is insufficient or no training at all regarding new policies, like the curricula that are constantly being revised and changed. This is one reason some policies do not become as effective as they were intended to be. As mentioned before, the implementation process is not made clear to the implementers. In addition, Manuel (2012) argues that the lack of quality

leadership training for our school leaders leaves our schools stagnant with regards to leadership development.

The Task Team Report on Education Management Development (Department of Education, 1996) is one of several policies that advocate for shared leadership and management in schools. But because of what Greenlee (2002, p.47) describes as “the bureaucratic organisational structures in schools”, it becomes impossible. Principals are not ready to re-distribute power, Grant (2010) and do not have what Gronn (2000, p.324) terms “the capacity to relinquish, so that the latent, creative powers of teachers can be released” through distributed leadership. It is against this backdrop that I ultimately ascribe to transformational leadership as a model of leadership our leaders should strive for so as to be able to embrace the changes that are taking place in our education system including realising the need for teamwork and collaboration as some of the strategies that, if implemented well can impact on school effectiveness. It is from such thinking that I have included these discussions in my review. In the next chapter I discuss the research design and methodology pertinent to my study.

## CHAPTER 3

### RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

#### 3.1 Introduction

This chapter deals with the methodology and its related concept of methods which are pertinent to the study. The differences in the concepts of methodology and methods are explained by Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2007). They define methods as the procedures used in the process of data gathering whilst methodology describes the approaches to the kinds of paradigms in research. On the other hand methodology is defined by Kothari (1990) as a systematic way of solving the research problem. Simply put, it is the various steps a researcher adopts in studying his/her research problem along with the justification for adopting such. Research methods or techniques as some call them, are the tools the researcher uses to solve the research problem like interviews. Neuman (2007) adds to the definitions that methodology is the entire research process whilst methods are the specific techniques used in a study to generate, refine and the analysis of data.

The purpose of my study was to explore teachers' perceptions and experiences of teamwork and collaboration in their schools and how these influence school effectiveness. The chapter outlines the methodology and the methods I employed to answer my research questions. To achieve this, the chapter first discusses the aims and objectives of the study. It then moves to the context of the study which describes exactly where the research took place or the research sites. Sampling strategies or the choice of the participants and the justification thereof are elaborated on under that section. I then discuss access to the research sites which expands on the process of dealing with the gatekeepers or the people who have "formal or informal authority to control access to a site", Neuman (2011, p.429). The process of approaching the gatekeepers is discussed. How I generated my data as well as the process I followed to analyse them which is relevant to that kind of data also form part of the chapter. Issues of validity are outlined and the chapter concludes by looking at the possible limitations to the study.

## **Aims and Objectives of the Study**

The research plan provides a structure but it should be flexible and open to new discoveries which present themselves within the field. This is to say there needs to be a balance between the plan and the actual practical research in the field. As mentioned earlier, the aim of the study was to gain an understanding of the experiences of teachers on teamwork and collaboration in their schools, their perceptions on the subject and how these influence school effectiveness. Herewith I aimed to make some contribution to the existing body of knowledge on teamwork and collaboration and the influence they may have on school effectiveness.

My study attempted to explore teachers' experiences of teamwork and collaboration within a school setting. This also included their perceptions and unveiled the factors that enhanced or inhibited teamwork and collaboration in the two schools. In addition I wished to ascertain if engagement in teamwork and collaboration influences school effectiveness. To respond to the main aim of the study which sought to explore teachers' perceptions and experiences of teamwork and collaboration in their schools, a careful sampling process was facilitated which I will later discuss in this chapter. By selecting these teachers I intended to obtain their views on teamwork and collaboration and their relationship to school effectiveness as well as the factors that may hinder or enhance their implementation. I now move to the research paradigm which underpinned my study.

### **3.2 The Interpretive Paradigm**

A paradigm is a worldview or a belief system which determines how one sees the world. "Research paradigms define for the researcher what it is they are about, and what falls within and outside the limits of legitimate research", (Guba & Lincoln 1994, p.108). For an interpretive researcher, the goal is to know more about the feelings of participants and look at things the way they do, Neuman (2007). The worldview influences the researcher's position regarding the subject of study. Bassey (1994, p.42) defines a paradigm as a "network of coherent ideas about the nature of the world and of the functions of researchers which, adhered to by a group of researchers, conditions the patterns of their thinking and underpins their research actions". In addition, the adoption of a research paradigm is often influenced by the professional, political and institutional identities of researchers (Morgan, 2007). I

believe, like van der Mescht (2002) that the nature of the problem under study should determine the choice of a paradigm and methodology.

Within the interpretive paradigm the researcher seeks to understand the world in terms of the people studied and data generated therein is mostly qualitative. The interest is in “understanding the meaning people have constructed, that is how they make sense of their world, and the experiences they have in the world”, Merriam (1998, p.6). Furthermore, Niewehuis (2002, p.58) suggests “interpretive studies attempt to understand phenomenon through the meanings that people assign them”. My study sought to understand the meaning teachers have of the concepts of teamwork and collaboration in the two schools which were my research sites. It was for this reason then that my study had adopted this kind of research orientation as it ascribed to the interpretivist stance.

### 3.3 The Case Study Research

The general methodological strategy of my research was that it was a small scale study in two primary schools within the Umgungundlovu District. The study, as mentioned earlier sought to explore teachers` perceptions and experiences of teamwork and collaboration and how these influence school effectiveness. A case study approach seemed appropriate for this research as it sought to gain an understanding of teachers` attitudes, views and standpoints on teamwork and collaboration. Cohen et al (2007, p.253) citing Nisbet and Watt refer to it as “a specific instance that is frequently designed to illustrate a more general principle”. According to Yin cited in Bassey (1999, p.26) a case study is “an empirical enquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within a real life context”. Yin (1994) further distinguishes between three forms of case study, namely: exploratory, explanatory and descriptive. For Neuman (2007) the aim of an exploratory study is to familiarise one with the fundamentals of the study. It is used when very little is known about the subject or when the subject is new. Also this helps to generate new ideas or hypotheses and to see how feasible the research is. Explanatory research is used to test a theory`s explanation. It serves to link issues and to determine the best possible explanation for the said topic and looks at why something happens. Comparing the new data with the old and locating them accordingly is what a

descriptive study does. The main purpose is to provide a detailed picture of the subject and may be used for policy decisions. This is where I located my study.

Accordingly, Kothari (1990) has no clear definition of what a case study is but states that it is a method that seeks to obtain depth rather than breadth in a study. He cites its characteristics to include that the researcher, using this method can study one or more units in a comprehensive manner. The chosen unit or units are studied intensively so as to gain information that allows correct inferences to be drawn. The unit is studied in its totality. He concludes that through a case study a deeper perception and insight into life are obtained. Cohen et al (2007) define a case study as giving a “thick description”. My own study measured up to the definitions given by the said authors. Since a case study has no data collection methods unique to it but relies on multiple sources of evidence, Bassey (1999), it therefore gives the researcher flexibility to employ any method that she/he deems fit for the study. The implementation thereof therefore opens it up to some strengths as well as weaknesses which I now turn my attention to.

### 3.3.1 Strengths and weaknesses

A case study, like any other research method has its perceived strengths and weaknesses. Babbie and Mouton (2003) point to the volume of data generated through this method and the difficulty some researchers face in organising them. Being a small scale study, the results may not be easily generalisable, Cohen et al (2007) citing Nisbet and Watt. The strengths include among others, the fact that by studying one case or situation, the researcher can gain insight into other similar cases or situations. A case study allows for research to be conducted by a single researcher instead of a team, as I did in my study. The language in which results are presented makes it easy for any reader to comprehend as there is no specific jargon attached to it. A case study also has the ability to present reality as it is experienced and it also enhances the researcher`s experience. It can be useful in taking decisions related to management problems. Case studies are able to catch unique data that would otherwise be lost if a large scale study had been used.

### **3.4 Methodology**

#### **3.4.1 *The Qualitative Approach***

The topic of my study which sought to explore teachers' perceptions and experiences of teamwork and collaboration directed my study towards a qualitative approach. Ivankova, Creswell and Clark (2007, p.254) define qualitative research as "an enquiry process of understanding, where the researcher develops a complex holistic picture and conducts the study in a natural setting". They add that qualitative samples are small, purposively selected from individuals who possess the most knowledge and experience on the studied phenomenon. This definition fits my own study. Noteworthy, is that conducting a qualitative study enables participants to describe the subject of study using their own words. They express their views, give words to their experiences and describe events and situations which may result in obtaining rich, detailed data. I argue that the focus group which is one of the research instruments I employed to generate my data had the same to offer. This is discussed later in the chapter. Using a qualitative orientation allows the researcher to adjust data collection and data analysis to emerging findings. In addition, a qualitative approach may allow researchers to recruit participants that are difficult to reach in order to study their topics thoroughly. Strange and uncommon topics can be investigated using a qualitative approach. I now move to my sampling technique.

### **3.5 Sampling**

The main reason for sampling is that we cannot study every case we are interested in so we select cases from the whole population which we can study in detail. Therefore sampling means the researcher picks a certain number of units from the whole population which she/he uses to study in order to gain more information on the research subject. In selecting these cases issues of how many or the size of the sample, representativeness, gaining permission to work with the sample and lastly the strategy that determines the sample choice as suggested by Cohen et al (2007) all need to be considered. I had attempted to take this advice in my own study for which the discussion follows. Neuman (2011) citing (Flick 1998 p, 41) argues that for a qualitative study, "it is their relevance to the research topic rather than their representativeness which determines the way in which the people to be studied are selected". In addition, the goal is to deepen understanding of the studied

phenomenon and results obtained therefrom only apply to the studied cases. My own study ascribed to same.

Various factors determined the sampling technique I adopted. Firstly, convenience and the costs associated with the whole research process were the key determinants for the choice of my research sites. The two schools I used were close to where I teach and that made it easy for me to get to them. Further to that, the willingness to participate in the study and my belief that they were the best possible settings where I can observe my subject were also important considerations. Moss and Field (1996) term this maximization, whereby selecting a location for the study is determined by where the topic reveals itself most strongly. They advise that one should choose a location from which most can be learned about the research topic. I invited a maximum of forty teachers, twenty per school for the completion of the questionnaire. Thereafter twelve teachers, six from each school participated in the focus group interviews, which depended on their availability and willingness to participate.

Both questionnaire and focus group participants comprised of male and female teachers from the School Management Team (SMT) and post level one (PL1). Teachers who participated in the questionnaire completion were also invited to the focus group. Given that the study focused on teachers` perceptions and experiences of teamwork and collaboration, whoever wanted to participate in the study was self chosen.

### **3.6 Gaining Access**

General goodwill, respect, co-operation are some of the key considerations in gaining access to the research sites, (Manuel, 2012). Conducting field research might be regarded as an invasion of one`s privacy in terms of time that the respondents spend in responding to the research questions through whichever method the researcher has chosen to employ, be it interviews or questionnaires. The researcher needs to be tactful, well organised and be prepared for the field so that the research process goes as planned. Gaining access means obtaining permission to use a specific site to conduct research. Neuman (2007, p.429) defines a site as “the context in which events or activities occur, a socially defined territory with flexible and shifting boundaries”. In order to gain access, one has to deal with

gatekeepers. According to Neuman (2007, p.429) “gatekeepers are the people with formal or informal authority to control access to the site”.

Organisations like schools have authorities from whom one needs to obtain permission to access the site. There are regulations that restrict access to sites like schools. The Department of Education (DoE) and the School Governing Body (SGB) are some of the gatekeepers of a school. Neuman (2011, p.429) further asserts that “access to a site can be an issue”. Cohen et al (2007, p.55) support this view when they argue that “access is not an expected right but a privilege”. In addition, researchers need to “demonstrate that they are worthy as researchers and human beings of being accorded access to the facilities needed to carry out their investigation”.

The first stage of access was to obtain permission to undertake the study from the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education (KZN DoE). A letter requesting permission was written to the department. Permission from participating schools in the form of a formal letter explaining the project and the declaration by the principal were then sought. Thereafter participants in the study were recruited. They were given clarification on the project and assured about confidentiality, anonymity and their right to withdraw from the project at any given time. This served to ensure that participants fully understood the process and their informed consent was given. The prescripts of the university are carefully adhered to in this respect. Furthermore participants were made familiar with the scope and reasons for my research with a detailed letter which also explained my association with the university and gave details of my supervising researcher. One had to establish a culture of trust and responsibility in order to gain access. I now move to the context within which my study was conducted.

### **3.7 Context of the Study**

The two schools I had chosen as my research sites were both located in the urban areas. One in a formerly proclaimed Coloured area and the other one a former Indian area, but since our democracy in 1994, every child, regardless of race has a right to be enrolled in these schools. Mostly, children in these schools came from the surrounding informal settlements and the townships where these schools are located. The staff and learner demographics have changed dramatically over the

years. The learners as well as the teachers comprised different racial groups. There are Coloureds, Indians as well as Blacks. I will refer to these schools as School A and School B.

### **School A**

This was a primary school with a staff complement of thirty five teachers, all of whom are state paid. There were two school administrators, one is paid by the state and the other one by the School Governing Body (SGB). There were nine general assistants who were responsible for the maintenance of the school buildings and grounds. Two cooks ensured that the learners are served a healthy meal every day.

The School Management Team (SMT) comprised the principal, two deputy principals and four heads of department. There was a computer teacher who was also state-paid. Besides the standard curriculum, the school had an extra-mural programme which offered different sporting codes to the learners. There was a functional and supportive School Governing Body (SGB) and the community took pride in the school and supported all its educational activities. The school's success can be attributed to all these factors and I believe these were some of the reasons as to why the school still boasted a high enrolment.

The buildings, which were well maintained consisted of an administrative block which had the principal's office, offices for the secretaries and deputy-principals and a staff room. There were separate blocks for the junior primary and senior primary with one classroom converted into a computer room. There were separate ablution facilities for boys and girls, a feeding scheme area wherein learners sit and enjoy their meal. A huge well maintained soccer field, rugby and netball fields as well as a general play area are built. The school's security was ensured by a fence constructed around it and a security guard at the gate who controls access to the school.

### **School B**

School B was also a primary school, offering grades one to seven. The staff establishment was twenty one state-paid teachers headed by a female principal. There was one deputy-principal and three heads of department. The school offered tuition through the medium of English with IsiZulu as its first additional language. The

school premises were kept tidy. Although there was no security guard at the gate like in school A, the school was fully fenced and appeared safe.

As one entered the gate, there was an inviting atmosphere that seemed conducive for effective teaching and learning. Although School B was newer than School A, it was not as well resourced as School A. There was no computer programme for the learners which I think contributed to the school having less learner enrolment than School A although they are in close proximity to each other. The buildings were well maintained but some classrooms were not in use as the school's enrolment had since dropped from what it initially was when the school started. There was a functional extra-mural programme at the school. The school offered a sound educational programme and a culture of teaching and learning was evident. The data collection plan which included my two research instruments I used to generate my data follow.

### **3.8 Data Collection Plan**

This section presents the research instruments I used in generating my data to answer my research questions. The sampling process is also explained. As mentioned earlier, a case study has no specific data collection method, as it relies on multiple sources of evidence, Bassey (1999) citing Yin. For my study I had chosen to use closed, structured questionnaires which I intended administering to the entire staff in both schools I have identified as my research sites. Focus group interviews were another level of my field research that I used to complement the data generated from questionnaires. I now briefly look at each of the data collection instruments that I used.

#### **3.8.1 *Closed Questionnaires***

Cohen et al (2007) warn that closed questionnaires can be an intrusion into respondents' lives because they may ask for confidential information like a person's age or qualifications. It also requires respondents to use their time when responding to them. I decided on employing questionnaires because of their ability to gather information from a large population in one or several locations without necessarily making personal contact with the respondents. They also lend themselves to a logical and organised form of data analysis, Anderson and Arsenault (1998).

Structured, closed questionnaires seemed to be an appropriate data collection instrument for my study because they fairly and comprehensively covered the domains of my research questions and also attempted to address the issue of internal validity which will be discussed later in the chapter.

My questionnaire was designed to consist of first, the respondents' biographical information. The second section had questions which I believe addressed my research questions. A Likert Scale of one to four was then used. Careful consideration was taken not to make the questionnaire too long so as to avoid respondents' fatigue. I took Cohen's et al (2007) advice in constructing my questionnaire. This concerns issues of content. This ensures that respondents give the information they are asked for. The second issue is about the wording of the questionnaire. To ensure that questions are clearly understood by respondents, simple language was used and unclear phrases avoided. Decisions about the form of response were carefully considered to ensure there was no overlap and that the wording of items was balanced. I also attempted to sequence my questions so that there was coherence between them. The questionnaire was not the primary instrument for generating my data but it gave me some background information about the respondents that also helped verify teachers' views of teamwork and collaboration and also set the tone for my main data collection instrument, the focus group interviews and particularly for the whole research process.

### **3.8.2 Focus Group**

A focus group consists of respondents who are interviewed together. Although Neuman (2011) advises that a focus group should be kept moderately homogeneous to ensure openness among its members, I believe that a heterogeneous group allowed for diverse views from respondents. This sentiment is shared by Rule and John (2011) when they state that focus groups enable the researcher to gain a range of diverse views and responses not previously aired. Neuman (2011) further advises that participants for a focus group should be carefully selected and be given clear instructions. In addition he shares some advantages as well as limitations for the use of focus groups which I took into consideration as I proceeded with my study. The setting for the focus group allowed participants to voice their opinions freely which I can argue depended on how the group was comprised. Participants could discuss

issues with each other and if disagreements arise they were explored in detail. There was an opportunity of producing the best and much deeper understanding of the research problem. Niewehuis (2007,p.90) suggests that focus group interviews are based on an assumption that “group interactions widen the range of responses, activating forgotten details of experiences, releasing inhibitions that may otherwise discourage participants from disclosing information”. One obvious limitation is that of dominant speakers who always want to be listened to and do not give others a chance to talk. Power relations may be also a barrier to free participation of some members which I also observed in my own study.

My two focus groups, one from each school comprised six members each. Male and female teachers from both the School Management Team (SMT) and post level one were part of the group. I only used those who were interested in becoming part of my study. Further to that I had teachers with less than ten years teaching experience and those with more than ten so as to be able to obtain diverse views on how they experience and perceive teamwork and collaboration in their schools.

### **3.9 Data Analysis**

Data analysis is a process of systematically organising and integrating generated data. Vithal and Jansen (2007) argue that data analysis means making sense of accumulated data. Data analysis, according to Blanche, Durrheim and Ketty (2007, p.322) “involves reading through your data repeatedly, and engaging in activities of breaking the data down (thematizing and categorising) and building them up again in novel ways (elaborating and interpreting)”. The use of two different methods in generating my data called for different approaches to their analysis. For data generated from questionnaires a Statistical Package of Social Sciences (SPSS) was suitable for analysing such data. SPSS is a computerised data analysis package that has a range of statistical analysis processes and data management. It was useful in extracting the demographic information from the questionnaires.

For focus group interviews a different level of analysis was used. Miles and Hubberman`s (1994) three step suggestion was adopted in this regard. This involves reducing the data by means of selecting, focusing and simplifying then abstracting the data. Field notes, interview transcripts and any raw data are then transcribed. To reduce the data, coding is used then displayed and verified and thereafter inferences

are then drawn. Neuman (2007, p.507) defines inferring as “to pass a judgement, to use reasoning, and to reach a conclusion based on evidence”. Evidence in this regard is the generated data. Transcribed interviews were constantly revisited during the process.

The coding process involves organizing your data into categories to create themes and in so doing, research questions should act as a guide. Every line, a few words, a paragraph or a page can be coded depending on the richness of the data, Neuman (2011). He further advises that for a researcher to be able to code data into themes, she/he has to be knowledgeable on the subject, be able to identify patterns from the data, think in terms of systems and concepts and lastly, have the relevant information. I attempted to follow this advice but as a novice researcher, I was also mindful that it is a challenging process. Data was then interpreted in the light of available literature on my research subject of teamwork and collaboration. Reliability and validity assist in establishing the truthfulness and believability of the findings which I now turn to.

### **3.10 Reliability, Trustworthiness and Rigour**

In this section, I wish to briefly examine issues in my study that related to reliability, validity and rigour. In conducting field research, the researcher gets an opportunity to interpret subjective experiences within a social context. For any research to gain credibility, it needs to be rigorous. The reader must be able to judge if the research can be trusted. This is achieved through the researcher’s transparency of the processes of the whole study, the methodology. The research design and methodology, the topic of the chapter, form part of that. To increase credibility in my study, relevant literature on the subject had been reviewed in order to relate my research to already existing knowledge on the subject and to identify any gaps in the literature that may exist. The research proposal attempted to address the processes involved in the whole study.

Furthermore, for research to be credible, it needs to be relevant so that it makes a contribution to something or someone. Reliable research needs to be consistent. If the same research is conducted elsewhere under similar conditions, the findings must be the same. According to Neuman (2011), validity relates to the truthfulness of the research findings. It should reflect what is being measured. The researcher

needs to be explicit about what is being measured which I have attempted to do in my own study.

“Validity is an important key to effective research”, Cohen et al (2007, p.133). Validity is not limited to demonstrating that the research instrument measures what it is intended to measure, as argued by Kothari (1990). Validity in qualitative data is rather “through the honesty, depth, richness and scope of the data achieved”, Cohen et al (2007, p.133). They further outline a number of principles that research must display, as cited in Lincoln and Guba (1985), Bogden and Biklen (1992). These include that the natural setting is the key source of data. This I have enhanced in my study by immersing myself into the authentic experiences in order to generate my data. Giving a thick description, which is a feature of a case study, also enhanced the study’s validity. In addition, the authors give advice on ensuring validity at different levels of the study. During the design stage, the researcher needs to ensure that appropriate data gathering instruments are chosen for the study which I had sought to do in my own study. I had also ensured readability levels by using simple language and by avoiding unclear phrases in designing the questionnaire. An attempt was made not to make both my research instruments too long so as to avoid participant fatigue. To further enhance validity in my study during the analysis stage, subjective interpretations of data were dealt with through verification with the participants. Further probing was done on the questions during focus group interviews. The last stage, the reporting stage ensures that the positive as well as the negative that come out of the data are reported on. I now turn to the issues of ethics in the research.

### **3.11 Ethical Issues**

As a field researcher it is advisable that one prepares in advance for possible ethical dilemmas that might arise during the research process. This is done during the planning stage or while designing the study. This preparation provides guidance as to how the researcher conducts himself/herself during the research process and this depends entirely on the individual conducting the research. Ethics in research refers to the rules of behaviour during the research process. Neuman (2007,p.143) defines ethics as “the concerns, dilemmas and conflicts that arise over the proper way to conduct research”. A researcher may act in an ethically irresponsible manner due to

a lot of reasons which include among others pressure to get done with the research process. It therefore becomes the responsibility of the researcher to ensure that participants are at all times protected and no harm is caused to them. Neuman (2011) cautions on the different forms of harm that could be caused to research participants. He lists the following three key possible forms of harm that researchers must be mindful of.

The first form comes from a physical perspective. This is a rare kind of harm, however researchers need to take the necessary precautions by anticipating any possible risks before the start of the research process. This can mean ensuring safety in the buildings within which research is conducted. Another safety measure may be the screening of participants for any health conditions that might be detrimental to the research process like seizures. In the event that a participant experiences an attack during the course of the process, this may not only cause a distraction to the process but may also create a bad impression for the researchers.

The second key form of harm stems from a psychological aspect. Neuman (2011) refers to this form of harm as psychological abuse, stress or loss of self-esteem. A sensitive researcher needs to take precautions not to harm participants by causing unnecessary psychological discomfort by either exposing them to stressful or anxious situations or even fear. This can mean the researcher creating high levels of stress to participants like exposing them to gruesome situations or telling stories that lead to discomfort. Neuman (2011) further cites the third form of harm from a legal field. As a researcher one has to be aware of any potential legal issues that might crop up during the study while designing it. Researchers need to, at all times try to protect the participants. If by any chance some kind of harm occurs, the researcher should make a follow up and try to offer some help that is relevant to the specific harm that might have been caused as a result of the research. This may even lead to the study being terminated if participants cannot be guaranteed safety. With regards to my own study, no harm had been anticipated but measures were put in place to deal with unforeseen circumstances accordingly. I was also vigilant and cautious that these were highly avoided.

In this regard, participants were guaranteed anonymity and confidentiality. They were made aware of the purpose, processes and the intended outcomes of the

research, (Cohen et al, 2007). They were also advised of their right to withdraw from the study at any time. A written consent had to be obtained so they could commit to the study voluntarily knowing they were protected. Furthermore, participants` names were not to be used when referring to them during the study and the report writing process. Noteworthy, is the fact that ethics does not only concern the relationship between the researcher and the participants but it also has to do with the researcher`s conduct towards the study itself.

The university prescribes a code of ethics policy to which all researching students are expected to adhere. This is in tandem with Neuman`s (2011) advice to all researchers like that of respecting participants` privacy. This includes the researcher`s responsibility not to falsify data. This, he refers to as scientific misconduct. A researcher may also distort data or a data collection method and also not acknowledge the sources that have been used or plagiarism. Research fraud occurs when a researcher falsifies or makes up data that was not initially collected or presents a false report of the research process. The abuse of power is another ethical issue that researchers need to be mindful of. It may very much lead to research becoming a flaw and may dent the image of the institution under whose auspices the research is conducted

### **3.12 Limitations**

It is imperative to prepare a design for the study prior to doing field research. A well prepared research plan helps keep the process on track but it does not guarantee a project free from any challenges. Field research involves what Neuman (2007, p.421) describe as observing ordinary events in their natural settings and a “direct face to face social interaction with real people in real social settings”. As a researcher, one has no control over such settings. Doing field research means studying people in their natural courses/ environments/ contexts. It involves talking with and observing participants. A field researcher wants to learn firsthand about how people live, talk and behave, Neuman (2011). The same applied to my study, venturing into the world of participants had its own challenges.

The use of questionnaires in my study limited the openness of participants and also deprived me as a researcher of the opportunity to probe or ask follow up questions. Questionnaires also deny respondents the opportunity to add their own remarks or

give further explanations on the subject. Neuman citing Opperman (1992, p.115) further warns that “the categories given on the questionnaires may not be exhaustive and some bias may be reflected on them”, which was also the case with mine. To overcome this limitation, I did not rely on this method as my sole data generating technique. To complement my data and allow respondents to freely voice their views on the subject, focus group interviews were also conducted.

Secondly, the choice of one of my research site, which was my own school was the source of other challenges. My positionality, as a Head of Department may have had a negative impact on my study. The accounts by some participants raised questions in terms of honesty in their views which may be accounted to power relations. As a colleague who the participants knew and had to then assume a researcher role may have been uncomfortable to both the participants and myself. My reflexive approach and skilfulness in presenting myself to the participants helped stabilise the effects of such limitations.

The choice of my sample for the focus group interviews, which included both post level 1 teachers and the School Management Team (SMT) members within the same group had effects of power which led to some members dominating the group discussion and others not being free to voice their views. This was dealt with by arranging separate individual interviews with those members who I felt were not free during focus group interviews.

Finally, using the third term at school for the data generating process seemed so inconvenient for the school and myself as a part time student. This is undoubtedly the shortest and busiest term. I was faced with time constraints in terms of finishing the research process and working on the data I had generated. However, using my own school as one of my research sites was to my advantage and was convenient to me as I utilised every opportunity that presented itself in doing as much as I could in terms of completing my research.

### **3.13 Conclusion**

As explained at the beginning of the chapter, methodology and method are interdependent concepts with methods referring to a range of techniques researchers use in studying selected cases, so as to generate and analyse data. On

the other hand methodology is the understanding of the whole research process. The findings on social research are useful in making important decisions like the one of formulating policy. Furthermore, they teach one more about the research subject. The knowledge that one has before the project, is not the same as after the project has been completed.

Conducting a study on my particular subject of exploring teachers' perceptions and experiences of teamwork and collaboration and how they can influence school effectiveness, surely developed me as a novice researcher in understanding the methodology and in particular in deepening my insight on the subject because of the amount of literature I reviewed and the immersion into the authentic experiences of participants. I have learnt a lot from the study and the study has inspired me to conduct more research in future at a more advanced level so as to make some contribution to the academic world.

## CHAPTER 4

### PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

#### 4.1 Introduction

The aim of this research was to explore the perceptions and experiences teachers have on the concepts of teamwork and collaboration and also to ascertain their impact on school effectiveness. In this chapter I present the data together with its interpretation based on the research questions which guided my study. These ultimately reveal the findings in the two research sites I have utilised in gathering my data. As mentioned in chapter three of my dissertation, I employed two research instruments for data generation. The first being the closed questionnaires and the other one was the semi-structured interviews conducted with two focus groups, one from each school. To analyse the data from the questionnaires, I used a computer programme, the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). For the qualitative data generated from focus group interviews I employed a thematic content analysis method.

The data was interpreted systematically with a focus on my research questions in mind. For the purposes of this presentation I have used the following labels to make it clear to the reader: survey questionnaires (SQ), focus group A (FGA) and focus group B (FGB). For the survey questionnaires, a range of responses from which respondents chose were provided following Cohen`s et al (2007) advice of formulating questionnaires. The aim of using the focus group interviews was “to obtain rich descriptive data that will help you understand the participants` construction of knowledge and social reality”, Niewehuis (2010, p.87). This I believe was the case during the process of interviews. Participants were responding about their own experiences and expressed their views on the subject of teamwork and collaboration in their own schools. The section that follows presents the two cases of my study which I refer to as School A and School B.

#### 4.2 Introducing the two case Schools

In this section I start with a description of each of the two schools which served as my research sites and I then move on to a discussion of each of the focus groups from the two schools. These were the participants that agreed to be part of my study

which was discussed in detail in chapter three. I believe like Folkestad (2008) that even though the same questions may be presented to each focus group, the responses vary depending on the context of the study. In his words, “data is influenced by the very interview situation itself”, (p.4). Furthermore as the researcher becomes more experienced he/she will find several “buttons to push in order to get the information we are searching for”, Folkestad (2008 ,p.4). This informed my decision to tackle each school independently. I now move to a discussion on School A.

#### **4.2.1 School A**

School A was an urban primary school located within a former coloureds only location but which after 1994 became residence to all races. It is surrounded by an industrial area and located within the Pietermaritzburg Region. School A was an English medium school that offered classes from Grade R to 7. The staff complement consisted of twenty five teachers. The School Management Team (SMT) comprised the principal, a deputy principal and three heads of department (HODs). Grade R to three constitute the Junior Phase (JP), the Intermediate Phase (IP) is from grade four to six and grade seven is the Senior Phase (SP). The demographics of the school have drastically changed over the years with Black learners constituting a larger percentage which had led to isiZulu becoming the first additional language (FAL) after English which had the status of home language (HL). Tuition, as mentioned earlier was offered in English, which is referred to as the language of learning and teaching (LOLT). The cultural diversity of learners which was also evident in this school, I believe like Ferguson (2006) called for complementary skills from a group of individuals. I can therefore argue that teamwork and collaboration are some of the approaches that teachers could use to improve teaching and learning and the whole school effectiveness.

At the time of the study, the school relied on annual school fees of a thousand rand, as indicated in the questionnaire response for its development and daily functioning. Some parents could not afford to pay school fees for their children so they applied for exemption which allowed them to be excluded from paying the fees. To supplement the school funds, fund-raising activities were organised and carried out by the teachers, the school governing body (SGB) together with the learners. The

success of these activities relied on teamwork and collaboration among all the stakeholders concerned. The issue of fund-raising was raised by participant B in FGB in explaining one of the school's experiences of teamwork and collaboration whereby a beauty pageant was organised by the teachers for the learners, "*we need to buy ink for our duplicating machine so as to prepare for our forthcoming exams*". The school had a minimal dropout rate of not more than 1%, furthermore, discipline, punctuality and attendance were good. In addition, both teachers and learners participated in teamwork and collaboration activities for the success of the school,

*We sit together as teachers, including the SMT to select and interview learners for our prefect body so as to assist with the maintenance of order and discipline in the school,*

The statement was raised by participant A in FGA. Interestingly, school A was led by a middle-aged female principal who was a very active member of one of the powerful teacher unions. Besides the standard curriculum that the school offered, there was also a fully functional extra-mural programme with a variety of sporting codes for the learners which was led by the teachers themselves as well as computer lessons for learners from grades four to seven.

#### **4.2.2 Focus Group A (FGA)**

##### Description of Focus Group A

Focus group A consisted of six participants, two of which were males and the other four were females. Of the two males one of them was an SMT member as well as one of the females. At the time of the study, which was towards the end of the year, it was difficult to get hold of SMT members as most of them were busy with administrative duties in preparation for the end of year examinations for the school. This was a very diverse group in terms of race, age and gender so I anticipated on obtaining diverse and rich data from them.

#### **4.2.3 Findings**

Firstly, when it came to the teachers' understanding of the concepts of teamwork and collaboration in school A which was a question that I directed to the whole focus group, the following response came up. Participant A responded that, "*fortunately,*

*we have an SMT member here among us who will be able to explain that one". After asking them why they expected an SMT member to respond, it was interesting to hear that teachers expect the SMT to always take a leading role. There is a stereotype that is embedded in teachers' minds that only those in formal leadership positions need to lead. Teachers at the school understood teamwork and collaboration as working together. They viewed the concepts as very important as one teacher stated,*

*Effectiveness of our school lies with teamwork and collaboration. When we work as a team we get different ideas from one another and you can work with those ideas to improve your teaching.*

Participant B reported that,

*There is a good sense of support given to anyone that leads a team, he further stated that, teamwork brings harmony among staff members, there is no gossiping when we work together. If a teacher encounters a problem during his/her teaching, it is discussed in our meetings. There are phase meetings, grade meetings as well as subject meetings where all issues related to the learners are discussed and we get different ideas from old teachers who are experienced in the field and the young ones who also have fresh ideas, no one is undermined.*

Both the SMT members and the level one educators agreed that there was teamwork and collaboration at the school and it was working for them. They emphasised that it made their job easier especially with all the new policies that are being introduced in the education system. The burden is shared, as Bush and Middlewood (2005) put it. *"We sit down and discuss new policies so that we are sure we are doing the right thing"*, participant C added,

*The department just sends stuff to schools without explaining exactly what is expected of the teachers so we conduct our own workshops to try and unpack those documents.*

This was supported by participant D who stressed that, *"teamwork is indeed a powerful tool at the school and it works"*. Teachers further revealed that not only did teamwork work amongst them as staff but also with all the other stakeholders

including the School Governing Body (SGB) as well as the community. They employed teamwork in projects even outside the curriculum like fund-raising. Participant A added that so many functions required them to work as teams, that included planning for the year and budgeting to ensure the smooth functioning of the school. *"We are allowed to have inputs and our ideas are valued even if we are not in management"*, that was a comment by participant C which confirmed the working together and how the teachers experienced teamwork in the school.

When it came to teachers' views and experiences of teamwork and collaboration in the school, this was what focus group A (FGA) had to say. Participant A stated that

*Teamwork and collaboration are powerful tools in the whole functioning of our school especially when it comes to curriculum matters. Our curriculum is constantly being revised and changed so we really need to work as a team to discuss such issues.*

Teachers went on to say that issues were discussed at a staff level whereby the principal chaired those meetings. Phase meetings involved different grades with the HOD as the head. Subject committees involved all the teachers that teach a specific subject within the phase. Subject meetings were co-ordinated by any teacher that had special interest or expertise in that subject regardless of any formal position they held. This was in line with Day and Harris (2002) argument who opine that leadership is dispersed across different departments, subjects and learner activities. This was the kind of teaming teachers described pertaining to curriculum management at the school. They went further to report that the collaboration that went on at the school helped reduce the pressure on them, they always tried to do things that benefited the learners rather than pleasing other people. *"Professionalism prevails at the school and the SMT has trust in the teachers"*. This was confidently said by participant B to describe the conditions underwhich they worked. Data gathered also revealed that the atmosphere at the school was supportive of teamwork, which is in line with Bush and Middlewood's (2005) view that "climate has a significant impact on whether teams succeed", (p.118). This was confirmed by participant C who indicated that, *"the principal is democratic, there is no top down management"*. Interestingly, participant A added that such an atmosphere resulted in

*Non-defiance, non-resistance and a good working spirit among the whole staff. When problems arise or we do something wrong, we are confronted in a rightful way.*

Surprisingly, participant B added,

*Our school is a conflict free place, we love each other, we have no time for fights, we come to school happy and we go home happy. When you are absent from school, you miss it so much such that when you are sick and the doctor gives you three days leave, you only stay at home for one day and then come back to work.*

This was because of the motivation and support they got from each other and from the SMT. The statement above reflected and also confirmed the atmosphere that prevailed at the school which enabled the teachers to work together easily. In contrast, participant D stated that the atmosphere at the school was a result that there were not a huge staff, that is why they claimed there was no conflict. A male participant challenged that and he related a story about a school he knew where there were only five teachers including the principal where conflict was at its highest level, so the number does not matter. He went further to say, "in the past, principals would prefer to have males than females in their staff because, no woman no cry", which he said jokingly and even sang the words. All these statements were an attempt to show how teamwork and collaboration unfolded at the school with the support they got from the SMT.

Teacher performance was another aspect they reported to have been impacted on by the way they collaborated as a staff. The participants agreed with each other when they raised the issue about how they would choose peer educators for their performance evaluation, the Integrated Quality Management System (IQMS). They disclosed that they would choose people whom they knew possessed skills they themselves did not have so that they can get developed in those skills. Consequently that would improve their own performance in teaching which resulted in learner achievement being also improved.

*In the past, I used to choose a peer who is my friend and I know will score me high so I could be perceived as a good teacher without realising that that had a negative impact on my teaching because I remained stagnant, no*

*development whatsoever. I unintentionally missed the opportunity for development, my focus was on money. Through working with others my mindset has changed.*

The teachers revealed that the ideas they shared with others in subject committees helped them especially in those subjects they were not good at.

*My learners` Technology marks have improved drastically through the collaboration we have in our subject meetings and even networking with teachers from neighbouring schools. Our HOD invited the subject advisor to workshop us on the subject. The subject is new to us, our initial teacher training course did not have this subject. I am proud of myself and my learners. I now teach the subject with confidence and I enjoy it. When results get analysed at the end of each term, my subject is one of the best performed in the grade. I am now the master in technology.*

The statements were a confirmation that working together, sharing ideas had an impact on teacher performance. School A confidently reported how they benefited from teamwork and the collaboration that went on at the school. The diversity of learners which included race, culture and socio-economic backgrounds impacted so much on the teaching and learning that went on at the school. Teachers sometimes need to understand learners` backgrounds and this requires a wide range of information and skills from groups of teachers. The staff needed to work collaboratively as teams.

School effectiveness was another aspect that the study sought to establish if it had any connection to the two elements that are significant in the study: teamwork and collaboration. This was stated by participant B that,

*Through learners`, teachers` as well as parents` efforts of raising funds together for the school, we have been able to purchase equipment such as a photocopier and paying the security guard.*

As mentioned earlier the good team spirit that prevailed at the school and the leadership style the principal used, as revealed by one participant were some of the conditions which contributed to school effectiveness.

Finally, according to the focus group interview schedule, FGA had to give their views on the advantages and disadvantages of using teamwork and collaboration within their school context which they had this to report.

*With teamwork, we have to bear with a member who takes long to understand something, as a result we waste time discussing only one issue. Teamwork is a hiding place for those who are lazy, they cannot be easily identified especially if the group is big and performs well. They just benefit from others without contributing anything.*

This notion is asserted by Bush and Middlewood (2005) as they state that teamwork can result in other members of the team relying on others. Participant D raised her concern about the way she felt about teamwork, she stated,

*I find it very difficult and intimidating to work in a team because I am a very shy and reserved person, even if I have good ideas I cannot share them with the rest of the group because I am shy, that's my personality I cannot change. I prefer working alone in my class.*

It was also evident from the data that teamwork can lead to divisions in the staff as you would find that those who are friends would always support each others` ideas even if they were not the best which raised another issue of what Bush and Middlewood (2005) and many other authors refer to as `groupthink`. Improved performance was also reported by the teachers. The message from such responses raised the question of the need for strong leadership that is also transformational in order to enhance team effectiveness. I now move to school B.

#### **4.2.4 School B**

School B was one of the many primary schools in the Umgungundlovu District. It was situated on the outskirts of Pietermaritzburg. I cannot fully declare the school`s location as rural because there was electricity and running water at the school and a tarred road led to the school and most amenities were within easy reach of the school. Both learner and teacher demographics were 100% Black. The language of learning and teaching (LOLT) was English with isiZulu offered at a home language (HL) level. The school offered classes from grade four to seven. It had an administration block which had a large fully-furnished staffroom, the principal`s office

and an administration officer's office. The school was initially built to accommodate about a thousand learners but many of its classrooms were vacant because of low enrolment. This was caused by learner migration to the ex-model C schools in search for better education because those schools are better resourced than the township schools because of the inequalities that existed prior to our democracy.

The enrolment at the school had since dropped to 489 learners with a staff complement of eleven teachers including the principal and two heads of department. The school no longer qualified for a deputy principal's post. The principal reported that most learners were orphaned and some even headed households. The socio-economic conditions were bad with a high unemployment rate. In addition, there was a nutrition programme at the school from which learners got their only meal of the day. Parents struggled to pay school fees which the school was dependent on for its functioning so they were exempted from paying. This was revealed by the school's secretary when we had an informal conversation about the school.

In spite of these conditions, the teachers were enthusiastic about their work. This was evident in the learner achievement that the school boasted. The principal, a middle-aged male was very supportive of his staff and had the welfare of each learner at heart, as revealed by participant B from the focus group.

#### **4.2.5 Focus Group B (FGB)**

##### Description of Focus Group B

Focus group B comprised four participants as per the size of the school. There was one male and three females all of whom were post level 1 (PL1) educators. At the time of my study there was an urgent SMT meeting at the school, which made it impossible for me to have them represented within my focus group. My attempts to get them at any other time were in vain. This robbed me of their views, however, it is noteworthy that their absence from the interview was to the advantage of the group because of the power relations that might have existed if they were part of the group. The teachers were free to voice their opinions even those they could not have if there was an SMT member present. This was evident as the interview progressed. All four participants, as mentioned earlier were Black and three of them in their middle ages with teaching experience of more than ten years. The other one was in

her fifties and had more than twenty years teaching experience. To clarify, this combination consisted of those who were interested to be part of my study.

For focus group B (FGB) teamwork and collaboration meant a different thing from what was revealed by FGA. They stressed that it was the working together of staff and SMT meanwhile with FGA it was understood as the working together of staff. In their view teamwork and collaboration were used at the school to discuss issues affecting learners. They were also used as a strategy to develop each other as a lot was discussed during their meetings. As a result of these meetings, teachers reported that their performance had improved. *“When I do my work, I do it with confidence because of the empowerment I get during our meetings”*. This was attested by participant C when she reported that,

*I know I am not good in all the subjects I teach but with the help I get from my colleagues, I am a better person, we need each other.*

Teamwork and collaboration were also seen to be useful even for extra-curricular activities.

*We have our cultural activities competitions which our school is very good at because of the expertise from different teachers who train our learners. The school has won several trophies which we are proud of as a school.*

The SMT, especially the principal was very supportive of teamwork because he knew its value. *“He is very good at identifying each teacher`s strengths and he would ask you to share with others what you are good at”*. I saw an atmosphere that supported teamwork and created opportunities for leadership which is in line with distributed leadership and one of the Task Team`s Report on Education Management and Development (Department of Education,1996) recommendations of collaborative management in schools. *“If we don`t work together we will not achieve much because everyone has something they are good at”*, a comment from one participant which is in line with how teams are composed according to literature. They are made up of individuals with complementary skills which is what Ferguson (2006) argues for and further maintains that that is what is needed *“to work with today`s diverse groups of students”*, (p.5). Ash and Persall (2000, p.17) argue that *“heads will have to become leaders of leaders, striving to develop a relationship of*

trust with staff and encouraging leadership and authority throughout the school". I believe this was what was evident at the school, the distribution of leadership to teachers not only in formal leadership positions but to those who were also willing and had the expertise to lead. Participant C, to remind the reader, a post level one (PL1) educator expressed that,

*it is better to engage with the principal directly rather than following the line function and hierarchy that exists at the school. The principal is more understanding than my immediate senior (HOD), she (HOD) is more demanding and puts so much pressure on us as teachers but if you go straight to the principal and raise your concern, he is more than willing to listen.*

This is in line with Grant and Singh's (2009,p.289) argument of challenging the South African style of leadership as they state, "the educational system can no longer be characterised by a hierarchical and bureaucratic style of management" as it appeared in school B. Most schools, especially in South Africa still believe in this style of leadership which has emphasis on formal positions of leadership. Grant and Singh (2009) further argue that the transformation of South African schools into professional communities of learning is unlikely to occur with such kind of leadership that is experienced in schools. This, to me revealed that even among the SMT itself, very little or no collaboration and teamwork ever took place. If you get different responses from the very people who were supposed to be promoting this teamwork among staff, chances were, it was hard for teamwork and collaboration to flourish at this school.

Teachers loose trust in an SMT that is not united and it affects the rest of the school's functionality and its effectiveness is hindered. Leadership plays a critical role in the transformation of schools. Cardno, cited in Bush and Middlewood (2005, p.114) argue for "the need for strong leadership to promote team development and organisational learning". The Norms and Standards for Educators policy (2000) expects that educators engage in the seven roles in the performance of their duties one of which is that of becoming a life-long learner. Without the teachers, especially school leaders engaging in this life-long learning process, the transformation of our school remains a challenge. Rogus (1988) describes the new ways of leadership as

leading in transformational ways. In addition, Ash and Persall (2000) describe the new leadership environment, created by the new ways of leadership as leaderful organisations. To confirm all this, participant D had this to say,

*The HOD is rigid, autocratic and her leadership skills are not good. She talks down upon us and does not involve us in decision-making, all we have to do is conform. I think she needs to improve her leadership skills, it is frustrating.*

Focus group B voiced their views on the good and the bad side of using teamwork and collaboration in their school. They viewed teamwork and collaboration as strategies for school improvement. However some evidence of the bad side was also revealed. Some teachers reported increased workloads as a result of engaging in teaming activities and the pressure to conform with what the team does, which was also evident in focus group A. Most teachers reported being empowered which they got from the different members of the team. They had learnt skills which they did not have through their engagement in teams.

*When I first came to the school, I did not know much about IQMS and as a result, I didn't like it. I used to stress so much when that period for IQMS came. Then I heard that one of the teachers was good at it and I was honest to my Developmental Support Group (DSG) about my shortcoming and they organised a workshop for the whole staff. Now I know what it is about.*

This teacher was trying to show how she had benefited from the collaboration that went on in the school. Furthermore, teamwork

*Keeps us on our toes, we get motivated by others in the group and you can't allow yourself to be always falling behind, we all want to shine and do our best. As we interact we get to know each other better and we develop teamwork skills such as tolerance. In that way, relationships also improve*

Participant B was confirming the benefits of using teamwork in the school and attested that human relations at the school were good because of the way they worked in teams. They knew who was good at what and knew exactly where to seek help from if they encountered any problems. The collaboration was amazing according to them. *"There is less conflict and less stress, I know I'm not alone in this journey, I enjoy my work"*. Certain conditions also existed which did not favour the

use of teamwork which included the school's context and leadership style by some SMT members, as reported earlier. This is asserted by Greenlee (2002, p.47) who describes a leadership model which exists in most South African schools as "the bureaucratic organisational structure of schools". This was confirmed, as mentioned earlier by a statement by the participant who commented on the rigid, autocratic HOD. Literature on teamwork provides certain factors as obstacles to team effectiveness. Participant D attested to this saying,

*We have people who always want to be listened to and when you try and raise your opinion they will always crush it.*

The teacher therefore felt her contributions were not valued and resorted to keeping quiet whenever there was a meeting. I now present the common themes that emerged from data generated from both schools. This I will do together, unlike in the presentation of data where each case school was done independently.

### **4.3 Findings**

In this section I present the findings of the study according to the three themes identified as significant, namely:

- Teachers' perceptions and experiences of teamwork and collaboration
- Support for teamwork and collaboration in the schools
- The factors that hinder teamwork and collaboration

In presenting the findings, reference was made to available literature on the subject.

#### **4.3.1 Teachers' perceptions and experiences of teamwork and collaboration**

Responses to the survey questionnaire revealed that the majority of teachers in the study had experiences of teamwork in their school contexts. Further to that, from the responses it emerged that teachers believed that teamwork can lead to school effectiveness. This was confirmed by the statements they made such as,

*The use of teamwork and collaboration empowers teachers and leads to improved learner achievement. Teachers gain confidence in doing their work and they acquire different skills from others.*

This was confirmed by one participant in school B when she confessed about her lack of knowledge about the IQMS which had changed after the collaboration and help she got from other teachers who were knowledgeable on that particular aspect of their work. Secondly, teachers' experiences of teamwork and collaboration were during school activities which included but were not limited to budgeting, planning for the year or any other activity that took place in the school like sports days, cultural activities competitions, fund-raising and parents' contact meetings. Teachers also reported engaging so much in teamwork for matters related to the curriculum management at the schools. They held phase meetings with their respective HODs, grade as well as subject meetings were also held. Teachers in the study perceived teamwork and collaboration as working together and sharing ideas for the benefit of individuals as well as of the whole school. They further viewed them as necessary tools to improve their performance. The data further revealed the teachers' understanding of these concepts as the working together of the teachers and the SMT. Because of the different contexts in which the two schools existed, teamwork and collaboration unfolded in different ways. Some of the factors that impacted on the degree in which these were experienced were the type of leadership for each school, the amount of support each one of them received as well as the structure and culture of their schools.

#### 4.3.2 Support for teamwork and collaboration

Data from the study confirmed the existence of teamwork and collaboration in both schools but the degree in which it happened varied from school to school. This I can argue was due to certain conditions that prevailed in each context. In relation to the support teachers received in engaging in teamwork and collaboration activities in the two schools, the following was evident. Teachers in the study claimed to receive support from the principal and the SMT. An atmosphere that was conducive to the effective practice of teamwork by the teachers was created. Time was made available for them even though it was limited due to the workloads that they had. One of the factors that was seen as supportive of teamwork was the leadership style that the principals of the schools employed. In School A it was clear that the principal had a specific style of leadership which the teachers described as democratic. She involved the teachers in school activities which made them feel valued and take ownership of what happened at the school because they were part of the decision-

making processes. Putting teachers in leadership positions whereby they had to lead subject committees was proof of the distribution of leadership that took place in the two schools. The notion is supported by Bush and Middlewood (2005, p.112) wherein they state that “if leadership is distributed widely, the potential effects are multiplied” and further assert that “team process produces positive effects that could not be achieved by individuals acting alone”, which is one of the reasons they were supportive of team efforts. Teachers reported that the principal made it easy for them to freely engage in teaming efforts because there was no top down management, that structure was highly commended by the teachers.

Muijs and Harris (2005) further argue that distributed leadership involves a redistribution of power by giving opportunities of leadership to those who do not hold formal positions of leadership which is what happened as teachers led different committees. The two schools differed in the amount of support they received perhaps because of the dynamics and the cultures that existed in them. One teacher from school B revealed that not the whole SMT supported them when they embarked on team efforts. They were specific in saying only the principal did but he also let the teachers work individually at times as we know that teaching is a solitary activity. It was clear from the data that the SMT in School B did not function as a unit itself. As one teacher disclosed that the HOD did not allow them any flexibility as the principal did.

Data also uncovered that teachers were supported by being given informal leadership positions. This is in line with Lieberman and colleagues` (1998) idea that for effective teacher leadership, schools need to develop a culture of collaboration, partnership, team teaching and collective decision-making. In School B, one participant stated that the principal would not succeed without the involvement of the teachers. Bush and Middlewood cite Hallinger and Heck (1999, p.186) who bluntly put it that “it is foolish to think that only principals provide leadership for school improvement”. I believe that the principals in the study realised that sharing leadership with the teachers was not a sign of losing control as some do but it was for the benefit of the school. Katzenmeyer and Moller (2001) further regard informal leadership as a symptom of teaching transformation wherein leadership is defined in terms of functions rather than titles. The Task Team Report on Education Management Development (Department of Education,1996) also recommends that

the task of management is about “working with people to make things happen”,(p.8). One can conclude through what data from the participants revealed that there was evidence for support for teamwork and collaboration in the two schools.

#### 4.3.3 Factors that hinder teamwork and collaboration

In both schools, there appeared to be some factors that hindered the effectiveness of teamwork and collaboration. The following section will look at those factors closely.

##### 4.3.3.1 The Power Dynamics

In a context like South Africa with its education system in the spotlight and undergoing numerous changes, leadership plays a crucial role. It is my belief that the success in all attempts of transforming our schools lies with the degree of collaboration that exists among all stakeholders. Hlatywayo (2010) asserts this as he states that “collaboration plays a central role in the development of a school as well as in each and every individual teacher`s professional growth”,(p.81).Collaboration is also recommended, as mentioned earlier, by the Task Team Report on Education Management Development (Department of Education,1996). The data revealed that some of the SMT members were not supportive of teamwork within their areas of management. They regarded it as a time consuming effort disregarding the benefits that it had. This was confirmed by participant A in FGB wherein the SMT was not represented who boldly stated that, “*some SMT members lack leadership skills, I don’t know how they got into those positions they are in*”, which reminded me of the Norms and Standards for Educators (2000) wherein it is clearly stated that among other roles the educators are expected to fulfil, is that of becoming a life-long learner. The lack of leadership skills that the teacher pointed to could be a result of lack of leadership training for school leaders which Manuel (2012) asserts has resulted in many schools remaining stagnant with respect to leadership development. Data on the questionnaire survey in both schools further revealed that the SMT did not create opportunities for teamwork and collaboration. However, this was in contrast with what transpired during the focus group interviews wherein teachers did agree to that. This confirms what Neuman (2011) regards as an advantage of using questionnaires whereby “respondents are more likely to answer about sensitive topics”,(p.325). I regard the questions as being sensitive because they sought information about the

SMT which respondents would not have been able to answer freely in their presence.

Data revealed that there was a management problem evident in School B whereby the HOD was described by one respondent as autocratic which was a stumbling block to the teachers` full engagement in teamwork. It was evident that power did not only come from the SMT, but was experienced amongst teachers themselves in their practice. This was supported by participant D, FGB who lamented, *“there are those of us who always want to be listened to but if you raise your opinion they will reject it”*. Also from FGB participant C confirmed that some teachers will support an idea just because it is coming from a friend even if it is not the best. So I would say even groups of teachers can exert power over others through the cliques that exist in the schools. In addition to the power dynamics that were evident in the two schools, participant D in FGB confirmed this when she sadly stated that ideas have to come from the management otherwise they will not be accepted. I view this as a huge barrier to teamwork and collaboration if formal positions mattered so much in the management of schools.

#### 4.3.3.2 Teachers

The micro politics that exist in schools have a great impact on the school`s overall effectiveness, Manuel (2012). He cites these as “informed by union affiliation, perceived closeness to authority” and many other factors (p.72). Cliques that exist in most schools were also highlighted by participants in the study. Participant A from School B stated,

*When teachers choose peers for their performance evaluation, they usually choose their own friends who will give them high scores even if they do not deserve them (scores).*

This, as mentioned earlier defeated the purpose of the exercise if teachers are made to feel that they are good. The data suggested that it was the very teachers that destroyed each other. Harris cites Barth (1999) who confirms this by saying that colleagues can be hostile to those who take on leadership roles. Participant C from School B expressed her experience that,

*During our subject committee meetings, I prefer to just keep quiet and not raise my opinion because there are those who are always against what others say but they cannot come up with any better ideas. Sometimes for my idea to be considered I will ask someone in the management to raise it as if it was coming from them, otherwise I will just keep my mouth shut until the end of the meeting.*

When I probed deeper into this issue, it appeared that it was the same issue of cliques that was the cause.

*Our HOD will gossip about our weaknesses to her friends during break time, so I prefer to stay the way I am and not to tell her if I have a problem*

What the responses revealed was that teachers had lost trust in the SMT and the teacher's self esteem was also affected. I briefly turn to time and school culture and structure as factors that hinder effective teamwork and collaboration.

#### 4.3.3.3 Time, School Culture and Structure

From the data in both schools, it emerged that time was an issue. Participant A from FGA revealed that,

*The results for teamwork are good but sometimes it can be time consuming especially with the workloads that we have, there is limited time for us to be meeting all the time. Sometimes we have to sacrifice our break time and meet to discuss any pressing issues. It is not a good thing and we do not always agree to that. My break is very important to me, I need to refresh after all the hard work so that I can have energy to carry on, the day is too long.*

These were some of the comments from the participants in the two schools which clearly disclosed how time can be a barrier to teamwork. They realised the benefits and could attest to that but they felt it was an added burden to them because of time constraints. The principle of time on task and task on time was strongly adhered to in School A such that there is very little time to engage in other activities. Teachers also raised concerns about the new curriculum that is being implemented: the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS), that it does not make allowance for the

holistic development of a child. This was confirmed by participant D from FGB who stated angrily,

*I don't know who designed this curriculum, there is no time allocated for extra-mural activities, we are always expected to be teaching and we are tired of these meetings that take up our break time.*

This indicated that teachers were not ready to sacrifice their time to engage in other activities. This is further confirmed by Grant's (2008) study which reveals that despite teachers' attempts to manage their time, they just don't find time because many of the teachers are studying as well. This I can fully attest to myself.

Participant A from FGB indicated that,

*The immediate senior (HOD) puts pressure on us more than the principal. She is so rigid, she is autocratic and speaks down upon us. If you ask to hand in your work the next day. She will say no, no, no, you are supposed to have finished, I want it today.*

Such a response made it very clear that the hierarchical structures in this school were very strong. It made teachers feel intimidated when their immediate senior is unapproachable and failed to listen to others' opinions. The kind of structure and culture as well did not seem conducive for collaboration. Teachers revealed that sometimes things were just imposed on them. I believe that the existence of structures in schools has good intentions like ensuring the attainment of organisational goals but at times it can prove very problematic and can hinder the very effectiveness of the school. The structure needs to be aligned with the needs of a school and not become a barrier. As Bush and Middlewood (2005, p.62) assert that "an abiding feature of structure is its emphasis on hierarchy" which I believe was evident in this school. In contrast to what School B reported. School A had a totally different experience of how the structure worked for them. The teachers acknowledged the existence of the management structure and its responsibilities but pointed out that for them it was not an issue that could hinder teamwork and how they collaborated.

Structure and culture are interdependent. Bush and Middlewood (2005, p.69) define structure as "the physical manifestation of the culture of an organisation" which

makes them so close. Furthermore, they emphasise the importance of co-leaders such as the deputy principal and the heads of department (HODs) in disseminating the school culture. I believe the HOD whom the teachers in FGB described as autocratic, rigid and gossiping about the teachers was not aware of her responsibility of creating a culture for her school which either is good or bad for the school. In this case I feel it was a bad one. In contrast, leaders need to display a culture that enhances the school effectiveness and in particular, as the subject of my study, teamwork and collaboration, like collegiality, professionalism, an ethical culture to name a few. That is why I remain convinced like many other authors that leadership plays a critical role in the transformation of schools.

#### **4.4 Conclusion**

This study attempted to explore the understanding and experiences teachers had on the concepts of teamwork and collaboration in the two case study schools. It further attempted to explore the role of the SMT in enhancing the concepts. Based on the data that was gathered from the teachers, the study confirmed that teamwork and collaboration were supported at the level of rhetoric, most likely because of the policies that call for collaboration in the management of schools like the Task Team Report on Education Management Development (Department of Education, 1996) and many others. It is an undisputed fact that for teamwork and collaboration to flourish in schools so that schools get the best out of them, leadership needs to be dispersed. Further to that, leadership needs to be supportive and create opportunities whereby teachers can freely engage in team activities. Schools also need to realise that in order to be able to work with the diverse groups of learners that we have in our schools, groups of teachers who possess complementary skills are the solution and those groups are the teams.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

#### **5.1 Introduction**

This chapter summarises the main findings of my study. Firstly, I will briefly discuss the findings on how the concepts of teamwork and collaboration unfolded within the context of my case study schools. I will then give a brief summary of each school separately. Thereafter I will examine the research process and conclude with some recommendations for future research on the subject.

As stated earlier, the study sought to explore teachers' perceptions and experiences of teamwork and collaboration in their schools and their impact on school effectiveness. The research questions that guided my study were:

1. How do teachers understand teamwork and collaboration in schools?
2. What role do the SMTs play in promoting teamwork and collaboration in schools?
3. What factors inhibit or enhance teamwork and collaboration in schools?

The findings from the study revealed that a certain degree of teamwork and collaboration were evident from the selected schools. Teachers did show an understanding of the concepts even though there were some limiting factors to their full manifestation. School A experienced teamwork and collaboration in a different way from School B which was attributed to a number of factors which included context. The findings from each school will be summarised separately in the next sections.

#### **5.2 Findings**

##### **School A**

The research findings clearly suggested that School A did not experience much of a problem in using teamwork and collaboration as tools to improve teachers' performance in particular and school effectiveness in general which was evident in their learner achievement. The leadership style used by the principal which the

teachers reported was democratic served as an advantage to the teachers' successful use of teamwork and collaboration in their school. This confirmed the teachers' assertion that the SMT was supportive of teamwork initiatives that they embarked on. There was a strong sense of collegiality between the SMT and teachers. As reported by the teachers, the principal in School A did not have a top down approach in her management which the teachers believed was a conducive factor for teamwork and collaboration to flourish. The structure and culture of the school made it possible for teachers to engage freely in teamwork and collaboration efforts that existed in the school. This was attested to by one teacher who stated that "there is harmony in our school". He went further to say, "the school is conflict free" and stated that since he came to the school, he had never experienced any conflict either between the principal and a teacher or amongst teachers themselves. This was also evident when another teacher testified that when they are away from school, either on leave or when the schools are closed, they miss school so much. Not only did the teachers engage in teams that already existed, they were also free to initiate, they did not wait for the management to delegate to them because leadership was a shared responsibility at the school. It was not only for those in formal leadership positions.

My use of closed questionnaires with the staff assisted me gather more information about the school which would not have been easy for the teachers to reveal during the focus group interviews. It also gave me background information about the school which added value to my research. The strong culture of time on task and task on time that prevailed in School A called for more collaborative efforts among staff which served to empower teachers to perform their duties with confidence. This was evident in the structures that the teachers reported to belong to, either as members or leaders of those structures. Those structures existed at phase as well as grade levels. These were the platforms where teachers could discuss matters pertaining to the curriculum or any other issues that added value to the teaching and learning processes. Teachers could also be elected to subject heads positions which confirmed the distribution of leadership that took place at the school. In spite of all the teamwork that was reported by the teachers in School A, there was no evidence of how its effectiveness was measured or any evaluation and monitoring processes that were in place to measure its success

The use of focus group interviews with the teachers helped me as a researcher to experience the teachers' feelings and excitement about the subject of my study. I was able to read even the body language and any facial expressions displayed during our time of interviews. It also gave me an opportunity to probe deeper into their responses. The teachers reported being motivated by others when they worked as teams. School A's teaming efforts were extended to the non-teaching staff as well as the School Governing Body (SGB). This was expressed by one teacher on how they received support from the SGB when they embarked on fund raising initiatives.

#### School B

With regards to School B which exhibited a totally different context from that of School A, the findings also varied. The findings in School B revealed a certain degree of teamwork and collaboration which were also attributed to the school's context. The findings revealed a strong hierarchical structure present in the school but despite that, teamwork and collaboration did exist among staff. This was uncovered when one participant expressed her understanding of the concepts as being the working together of the SMT and the teachers. That to me rang a bell that there might be a limited amount of teamwork and collaboration that went on between the SMT and the rest of the staff as opposed to what happened in School A. My assumption was confirmed by the teachers' responses from the questionnaire where the majority of them disagreed to receiving any support from the SMT with regards to teamwork and collaboration initiatives in the school. It is worth noting that the absence of the SMT in the focus group interviews did rob me of their views on the subject. However, as mentioned earlier, this was also to the participants' and my advantage as a researcher as some of the views could not have been expressed by the participants if the SMT was represented because of power dynamics. In that regard I believe teachers responded freely and authentically especially to the questions that pertained to the SMT.

About the style of leadership that the principal in School B used, one teacher expressed that the HOD, in particular, who was directly in charge of them according to the school structure, was autocratic. She would not negotiate anything with them which I perceived as a barrier to the teachers' engagement in any teamwork efforts. To confirm this thought, another teacher felt she will not make any contributions

during their meetings and had opted to just keeping quiet if there were any discussions going on. "Only ideas that came from the management were considered", this was one teacher's response. This I think is in line with Ash and Persall's (2000) argument of leaderful organisations, when they describe the new leadership environment that is required in our South African schools. Grant (2006, p.525) confirms this when she asserts that "many South African schools are still bureaucratically and hierarchically organised with principals who are autocratic". School B was just that. There was strong consideration for formal positions of leadership whereby only those who held formal leadership positions were expected to lead which is a different scenario from what was happening in School A. In School B leadership was not dispersed. The findings in School B suggested that the SMT should be developed in leadership skills so that they can be receptive to new innovations. I believe the case of a strong hierarchy in School B is unintentionally supported by departmental policies which emphasise accountability from those in formal leadership positions, the principals in particular. The teachers in School B disappointedly expressed that the management structure, which is that of a strong hierarchy as mentioned earlier limited them from fully realising their potential. If they had an idea, it must be communicated via the HOD. This is in contrast with Little's (1995) idea of teachers becoming leaders by learning from each other which is what teamwork advocates. Conditions such as those experienced by teachers in School B inhibit the successful use of teamwork and collaboration as strategies for school improvement which I believe are essential to schools especially in a country such as South Africa whose education system is being transformed.

### **5.3 Reflections on the Research Process**

This was a qualitative case study of two primary schools in the Umgungundlovu District. The two schools had, as mentioned earlier different contexts in terms of size, their structure and culture were different, their racial composition of learners and staff as well as their historical backgrounds. I believe, like Folkestad (2008) that the data gathered were influenced by the very contexts in which research was conducted. This was a small scale study therefore the results cannot be generalised. My research instruments were, as indicated in chapter three, the questionnaires and focus group interviews. These were also discussed in detail therein. The questionnaires were used to enhance my data collection which included information

about the two schools in my study. Questionnaires enabled me as a researcher to obtain background information about the schools. This also served as my data triangulation whereby insights about my subject were provided. Questionnaires were also an essential part of my study as they provided background ideology of the schools that the respondents in my focus groups were representing. I also reviewed literature on my subject which included both local and international sources. I found that the teachers in my study did have an understanding of what teamwork and collaboration mean. They even gave examples that required them to work as teams which ranged from fund-raising to curriculum matters where they explained the different levels of meetings they engaged in. Phase and grade meetings were oftenly held wherein teachers shared ideas and got empowered to perform their duties with confidence. Surprisingly none of the participants mentioned committees as a form of a team. I feel they did not regard committees they were members of as part of teamwork. I also identified a number of barriers as well as factors that enhanced teamwork and collaboration which existed in the two schools. These were dealt with in detail in chapter four. They mostly related to the structure and culture that existed in the schools, the leadership style that the management team, in particular the principal exercised, the power dynamics and time. Furthermore, the research process was challenging to me as a novice researcher. The logistics involved, ranging from gaining access to my research sites to the actual process of gathering data, were all nerve-racking. However I had gotten to the field very much aware of the possible challenges and tried to be as vigilant and making sure that they were minimised. The study itself was an eye-opener to me and I feel after finishing the process I was empowered and had gained confidence professionally and as a person. The study afforded me an opportunity to practically experience different educational theories and to gain more insight on the subject of my study. Most importantly, I remained focussed in spite of the challenges so as to complete my study. I believe teamwork and collaboration require commitment from all involved in order for them to truly impact on school effectiveness.

While the practice in School A is in line with what policy says, there seems to be a gap between policy and practice in school B. As Jansen (2002, p.202) warns that “dramatic policy announcements and sophisticated policy documents continue to make no or little reference to the modalities of implementation”. I believe this is also

the case in our country, good policies are being introduced with no clear guidelines for their implementation. Sometimes this results in some policies being flawed. The new policies that are being introduced in South Africa, in the education sector in particular, require that all involved parties work collaboratively in order for them (policies) to achieve their intended outcomes. The Norms and Standards for Educators (2000), the Task Team Report on Education Management and Development (Department of Education,1996) are some of such policies which promote collaboration in our schools. Gronn`s (2000) view of distributed leadership whereby individuals work jointly to pool their expertise for the product that is greater than the sum of their individual efforts, is also in line with the concepts of teamwork and collaboration which the study was about. The promotion of these strategies in schools remains the responsibility of all the stakeholders including the Department of Education. This study intended to make a contribution to the transformation process that is currently under way in our education system. As raised by the teachers in the study, there are so many benefits to the use of teamwork and collaboration but a lot still needs to be done so as to access their full benefits.

#### **5.4 Recommendations for Future Practice and for Further Research**

I remain convinced that teamwork and collaboration, if used properly, through them, a lot could be achieved in the transformation of our schools. The findings of this study revealed that these concepts are understood by the teachers and they also expressed their experiences on them. However it appeared that there are some areas that require urgent attention. These include the development of SMTs to enable them to monitor and evaluate how these are used. Teachers also need some form of development so that they become effective members of these teams for the benefit of the school. I suggest that the SMTs need to consider one of the views from the Norms and Standards for Educators (2000) seriously, that of being life-long learners so that they are ahead of the rest of the staff in terms of knowledge and skills. This will empower them to become effective leaders, boost their morale and to have confidence when performing their duties. The staff will also develop trust in them. Innovations that are introduced to schools, they will also be able to take the lead rather than being barriers to school transformation through lack of knowledge. One teacher in the focus Group interviews in School B noted that, “I do not know how teachers get promoted to these leadership positions, they do not have the skills

to lead". To add on to that I also believe that the bar is too low, the standards and criteria required in the recruitment of teachers into leadership positions need to be reconsidered. This is confirmed by Bush, Kiggundu and Moorosi (2011, p.31) in their study, they state that there is "emerging evidence that high quality leadership makes a significant difference to school improvement and learning outcomes". They also opine that "headship is a specialist occupation that requires specific preparation". They add that the only requirement for school principals is a teaching qualification and teaching experience. This makes me believe that leadership plays a crucial role on how a school functions, its success or failure mainly rests upon its leadership.

Another aspect of our schools that requires urgent attention, as mentioned earlier is the balance between policy announcements and their implementation. Policies should not be just "political symbolism", as Jansen (2002, p.200) warns. They should not be perceived by teachers as intimidating paperwork. I believe The Task Team Report on Education Management and Development (Department of Education, 1996) is one of the many documents that clearly states how our schools should be managed. Among its key recommendations is the collaborative approach in the management of schools. Arguably, I believe further research into the source of the barriers to teamwork and collaboration is essential and the means to alleviate those barriers so that schools can fully access the benefits of teamwork. The vast literature I reviewed on the subject is silent about the impact of teamwork and collaboration on school effectiveness, therefore I would recommend that that area be looked at.

Furthermore, there seems to be some mismatch between what literature says about teamwork and collaboration and the actual practice. This stems from what the teachers reported on how they engaged in teamwork in their schools. None of them reported about the different roles that each team member played as opposed to what literature says. In this regard, I would recommend continued research and development of teachers in teamwork skills which literature describes. I feel the lack of teamwork skills in teachers is a contributory factor to much of the barriers they experienced. A gap exists which calls for further research into the development of leadership in our South African Schools. I am still convinced that the success in our schools lies mainly with effective leadership. I believe, though in a limited scale, the Department of Education (2007) has heeded the call in this regard by introducing the

Advanced Certificate in Education: School Leadership (ACESL) for principals which has been reported to bear positive results.

## **5.5 Conclusion**

My twenty three years of teaching experience, my exposure to different teaching contexts including a multi-racial context and the changes that have since been taking place in our education system since our democracy all tell me that there is no way that any individual teacher can have all the solutions to the challenges that the changes present to our schools without the assistance of others. I therefore believe that teamwork and collaboration are powerful tools that can aid improve our schools and bring about the necessary changes. Working with diverse groups of students which came as a result of the restructuring and the reforms in our schools during this 21<sup>st</sup> century requires that teachers work collaboratively. As Ferguson (2006,p5) asserts, “only groups of teachers are likely to possess the wide range of information and skills really needed to work with today`s diverse groups of students”. Those groups of teachers are the teams. I feel the concepts of teamwork and collaboration need to be explored further. I further believe that, to the participants in the study, this experience was an eye-opener and an opportunity which after I had conducted the study with them, they would have gained more insight on the subject and maybe consider sharing the ideas with their colleagues for the betterment of their schools. The study had served to elucidate the concepts of teamwork and collaboration.

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# APPENDICES

## APPENDIX 1 a

University of KwaZulu-Natal

Private Bag x01

Scottsville

3209

Letter of Invitation

Dear \_\_\_\_\_

I am extending this invitation to you as a teacher who might be interested in participating in my research project on teamwork and collaboration. My name is Nomusa Mfeka and I am currently a Masters student at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, Pietermaritzburg. I would very much like to conduct research on teamwork and collaboration in your school and particularly work closely with you in extending the boundaries of my knowledge on these concepts.

My research project will be around the following questions:

What are the teachers' perceptions and experiences teachers have on how teamwork and collaboration can improve school effectiveness?

The subsidiary questions are:

- 1.How do teachers understand teamwork in schools?
- 2.What is the role of the principal in promoting teamwork and collaboration in the school?
- 3.What factors inhibit or enhance teamwork in schools?

I am seeking five teachers who:

- Are interested in the study
- Are willing to participate
- Are willing to contribute to school effectiveness through teamwork.

Kindly note that your identity will at all times be protected and the project does not seek to cause any harm to you nor evaluate your competence or performance. You will also be at liberty to withdraw from the research at any time as you so wish without any negative consequences. I can be contacted on my cellphone should there be any queries or questions regarding the study. My number is 0826842098.

Yours sincerely

Ms N. Mfeka

**APPENDIX 1 b**

Declaration

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

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## APPENDIX 2 a

University of KwaZulu-Natal

Private Bag x01

Scottsville

3209

The Principal

Dear \_\_\_\_\_

I am currently a student at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, Pietermaritzburg and engaged in a research project which aims to explore teachers' perceptions and experiences of teamwork and collaboration in schools. I have identified your school to assist me in exploring this topic. I would like to conduct this research in your school and work particularly with five teachers who are interested and willing to participate in this study.

Please note that this is by no means an evaluation of competence of neither the teachers nor the school. The school's as well as the teachers' identities will be protected in accordance with the code of ethics of the university. I undertake to uphold the autonomy of all participants and declare that they can withdraw from the research project at any given time. Furthermore, participants will be given feedback at the end of the project.

Please feel free to contact me for any queries or questions with regards to the project. My contact details are: 033-3903511 or 0826842098.

Yours sincerely

Ms Nomusa Mfeka

Masters student

**APPENDIX 2 b**

Declaration

I-----(full names of participant) hereby confirm that I fully understand the nature of the project. I am willing for my school to take part in this research project.

-----

Signature of principal

-----

Date

### APPENDIX 3.

Teamwork survey

Instructions: Please place a CROSS(X) in the column that describes your opinion on teamwork

Scale:4=strongly agree, 3=agree, 2=disagree, 1=strongly disagree

<b>I Believe that:</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>
1. Teachers are encouraged to take on leadership roles in my school.				
2.The SMT supports teamwork in my school.				
3.Teachers are adequately developed to participate in teamwork.				
4.SMT creates opportunities for teamwork in the school..				
5.Leadership is distributed or shared in my school.				
7.The culture or climate in my school is conducive for teamwork.				
8.Our cluster works as a team in solving problems and sharing ideas				
9.Teamwork can lead to school improvement.				
10.Departmental policies promote teamwork.				
11.There are functional teams/committees in my school.				
12.Teamwork should be encouraged in schools.				
13.Leading a team prepares teachers for formal leadership positions.				
14.Teamwork develops teachers` confidence in their work.				
15.Teamwork improves teacher performance.				
16.Teamwork improves relationships among staff members.				
17.Principals should be developed to manage teamwork in schools				
18.Teamwork improves teachers` confidence.				
19.Staff works better as teams.				
20.Teacher preparation courses should include teamwork training.				

## **APPENDIX 4**

### **FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW QUESTIONS**

1. How is teamwork and collaboration understood by the teachers at the school?  
Please explain.
  
2. What are your views and experiences on teamwork and collaboration?
  
3. How does the School Management Team (SMT) support teamwork and collaboration at the school?
  
4. How can teamwork and collaboration influence teacher performance?
  
5. How does teamwork and collaboration influence school effectiveness?
  
6. What do you think are the advantages or disadvantages of using teamwork and collaboration at the school?