

# Chapter



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## RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

### 3.1 Introduction

The purpose of this study is to explore the possible effects of formal university-based education management development programmes on the practical work of principals. In other words, it aims to look at what principals perceive to be the benefits of EMDPs on their practice in schools. The secondary purpose of this study is to investigate the kinds of challenges that principals in South Africa, specifically in the province of KwaZulu-Natal (KZN), are faced with in the post-apartheid era and their perceptions of the extent to which these EMDPs meet or fail to meet their needs and those of their schools.

In this study I work from an *interpretivist research paradigm* which posits that knowledge is constructed not only by observable phenomena, but also by people's subjective beliefs, values, reasons and understandings (Henning *et al.*, 2004; Creswell, 2007). According to Morrison (2002: 18), for interpretivists, "reality is not 'out there' as an amalgam of external phenomena waiting to be uncovered as 'facts', but a construct in which people understand reality in different ways." This means that knowledge is about the way in which people make meaning in their lives. Citing Trauth (2001), Henning *et al.* (2004: 21) contend that the foundational assumptions of interpretivists is that most of our knowledge

is gained, or at least filtered, through social constructions such as language, consciousness, shared meanings, documents and other artefacts.

Amongst some of the key assumptions of the interpretivist perspective outlined by Nieuwenhuis (2007: 59-60), three are central to the epistemological underpinnings of my study. Firstly, that interpretivism focuses on people's subjective experiences, on how people "construct" the social world by sharing meanings, and how they interact with or relate to each other. Secondly, that interpretivism proposes that there are multiple and not single realities of phenomena, and that these realities can differ across time and place. Thirdly, that researchers' own knowledge and understanding of phenomena constantly influences them (researchers) in terms of the types of questions that they ask and in the way that they conduct their research. According to Nieuwenhuis (2007: 60), the ultimate aim of interpretivist research is to provide insights into the way in which a particular group of people make sense of their situation or phenomena that they encounter.

The present study is located within the *phenomenological research approach*. According to Merriam and Associates (2002: 7), although the phenomenological notions of experience and understanding run through all qualitative research, one could engage in a phenomenological study using its techniques of inquiry that differentiate it from other types of qualitative inquiry. Phenomenological research seeks to understand the meaning of experiences of individuals about a phenomenon. In other words, as Bogdan and Taylor (1975: 14, cited by Morrison, 2002: 18) indicated, 'the phenomenologist attempts to see things from the person's point of view.'

Creswell (2007: 93) argues that the focus of the phenomenological approach "is a concept or phenomena and the "essence" of the lived experiences of persons about the

phenomenon.” Merriam and Associates (2002: 7) cite Patton (1990) who posited that phenomenological research is based on the assumption that there is an essence or essences to shared experience. Furthermore, Merriam (2002: 7) argues that the experiences of different people are bracketed, analysed and compared in order to identify the essences of the phenomenon — such as the essence of being a participant in a particular programme, as is the case in the present study. According to Creswell (2007), participants of the phenomenological study are selected on the basis of having experienced the phenomenon — as is also the case in the present study.

In this chapter I present a description of the research process from the data collection plan and techniques to a discussion of the data analysis strategies. The chapter is organised around eight areas of focus, namely, the scope of the research, the data collection plan, the study sample, the data collection techniques, the research instruments, the data analysis strategies, reliability and validity (or what most researchers refer to as trustworthiness and dependability) concerns and ethical concerns.

### **3.2 The scope of the research**

The study is focused on the South African province of KwaZulu-Natal (KZN). As indicated in Chapter One of this study (see section 1.8, first paragraph), the rationale behind focusing on this province is that it provides a good opportunity for this kind of study due to its diversity in the number of leadership and management development programmes offered and the clientele served by institutions in this province. The fact that principals from five

former Departments of Education <sup>22</sup> underwent education management development programmes in three different institutions of higher education makes this an appropriate province to study. Moreover, this is the province that I have substantial familiarity with and thus was convenient in terms of posing few problems as possible regarding the identification of relevant documentation, the identification of a pool of principals who have undergone EMDPs, the availability of participants for the study and negotiating and gaining access to research sites. I had worked in the province as a lecturer in one of the universities and as a training consultant for the provincial Department of Education's office-based staff, and therefore had developed important networks and established a good rapport with senior provincial management staff.

The three universities whose management/leadership department programmes are under review are (all pseudonyms): the University of Port Shepstone's Department of \_\_\_\_\_ programmes (excluding the Masters in Business Administration (Educational Management and Leadership (MBA—EML); the University of Melmoth School of \_\_\_\_\_ (North Campus) and the South Campus School of \_\_\_\_\_; and the Montclair University's Department of \_\_\_\_\_: South and North Campuses<sup>23</sup>. It should be mentioned that of all these programmes, the University of Melmoth School of \_\_\_\_\_ has the shortest history as it only started in 1998.

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<sup>22</sup> These former departments are the ex-House of Assembly for Whites, ex-House of Representatives for "Coloureds", ex-House of Delegates for "Indians", ex-Department of Education and Training for those Africans not under the so-called Homelands or Self-Governing Territories, and ex-KwaZulu Department of Education and Culture for those Africans under KwaZulu Homeland Government.

<sup>23</sup> These pseudonyms are used in this study in order to protect the identities of all individuals who were interviewed and the names of the higher education institutions (universities) whose programmes were reviewed.

The data for this research was collected over a period of three years — between 2001 and 2004 — punctuated by starts and stops due to circumstances beyond my control. In 2001 I was mainly engaged in the literature study on the subject of leadership and management development programmes both in South Africa and internationally. Unfortunately I spent a lot of time during that period (2001) focusing on so-called exemplary programmes that had been identified particularly in the North American context as having effected important reforms in their professional development of school leaders<sup>24</sup>.

This initial literature study was done with the erroneous belief (at that time) that the reform and reconstruction of EMDPs in South Africa needed to draw lessons from mostly North American programmes in order to ensure that they (South African programmes) are of high quality and standards — nothing but a kind of “copy and paste approach.” Fortunately in the latter part of 2001 and up to the middle of 2002, the literature study took on a different direction — more with a focus on empirical studies concerned with the assessment of the effectiveness of EMDPs.

It was also during this period (latter part of 2001 and middle of 2002) that the analysis of mainly policy documents — both provincial and national — was undertaken. Starting from the Report of the Task Team on Education Management Development (Department of Education, 1996), the national Department’s Guides for School Governing

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<sup>24</sup> Amongst others, I studied and wrote about reformed programmes offered at the following institutions: the Department of Administration and Policy Studies at Hofstra University; the Department of Educational Leadership at Miami University; the Prospective Principals’ Program at Stanford University; the Leadership Development Program at the University of Northern Colorado; the Ed.D. Program in Educational Administration at the University of Utah; the Doctoral Program in Educational Leadership at the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill; the Leadership Initiative for Tomorrow’s Schools (LIFTS) program at the State University of New York at Buffalo; the University of Alberta’s (Canada) Field Experience Model; the Fordham University’s Visionary Instructional Administrative (VIA 2000) Leadership program – to name but a few.

Bodies (Department of Education, 1999), Guides for School Management Teams (Department of Education, 2000b), and going through to the provincial Department's Policy Framework for Education Management Development (KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education and Culture, 1998), the School Management Manual (KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education and Culture, 2000) and the Master Strategic Plan: 2003—2006 (KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education and Culture, 2002). These documents formed the basis from which to understand the (policy) environment around the professional development of principals in South Africa in general and in KZN in particular. Other documents — such as position papers and keynote addresses by key policy makers in the national Department of Education — were to follow later during the data analysis period, and also proved useful in providing a critical contextual background.

It was during 2003 that the interviews with the different participants were conducted. I began with interviews with the key participants in the national Department of Education and in the provincial Department of Education, followed by interviews with the university lecturing staff of the three universities in KZN, and then the key participants of this study, the school principals.

### **3.3 Data collection plan**

Permission to conduct research in KwaZulu-Natal schools was sought through a letter to the then provincial Chief Executive Officer, Prof. C.R.M. Dlamini in September 2002<sup>25</sup> (Appendix A) , and it was granted on the 23/09/2002 (Appendix B). I then contacted a departmental official in the then Department of Education and Culture who provided me

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<sup>25</sup> At that time I was still registered as a Doctoral student with the State University of New York at Buffalo — that is, prior to transferring my studies to the University of Pretoria.

with the names of all school principals in the province of KwaZulu-Natal, available from the Department's PERSAL database. Although this information gave me a sense of the school principals' profile in KZN, it did not prove to be of much use mainly because the information about the principals' qualifications did not distinguish among the different specialisations that the school principal could have registered for when undergoing the EMD programme. In other words, from the database information there was no clarity as to whether a principal with a BEd (Honours) degree, for example, had attained the BEd (Honours) specialising in Education Management/Leadership or not.

Given the fact that I had previously taught in the BEd (Honours) and MEd programmes in one of the Universities in KZN and therefore had interacted with a number of school principals, I decided to utilise those networks in identifying potential participants who had completed either a BEd (Honours) or MEd in Education Management/Leadership. This proved to be useful because each former student I contacted provided me with a list of about ten or more colleagues that they knew who had undertaken EMDPs not only in the university where I had taught, but also in other universities in the province. I also contacted colleagues at the other two universities (three university campuses) and asked them to provide me with the contact details of all their former students who had undertaken and completed their programmes between 1996 and 2002. The contact details from colleagues in the other universities in the province also proved to be a useful endeavour because it yielded quite a large number of school principals' names who had undertaken and completed leadership and management development programmes in the four universities in KZN.

I went further to contact District Managers (DMs) and Superintendents of Education (SEMs) I had come across during the time when I had worked as a training

consultant in the different districts of the provinces. Given the fact that SEMs and DMs work closely with the school principals, they (SEMs and DMs) were able to provide me with comprehensive lists with all the relevant information, including the current contact details of the school principals. Information from all four sources yielded a total of 238 potential participants for my study.

I then began to contact the potential participants, inquiring about whether they indeed fulfilled the criteria I had set out, namely that they were practising principals who had been in the position for at least more than two years and had undertaken and completed a professional development programme between 1996 and 2002, specialising in Education Management/Leadership. I also inquired from those who fulfilled the criteria about their willingness and availability to participate in the study. After a process which eliminated those who did not fit the profile — due to reasons ranging from those whose contact details had changed and therefore I could not locate, to the fact that they were not practising principals, they had not specialised in Education Management/Leadership or were not available to be interviewed — I ended with a sample of forty-two (42) school principals, a number that was further reduced to thirty-one (31) due to the fact that some principals who were interviewed did not meet the criteria set out for the study.

When the study was initially conceptualised, the plan was to focus only on high school principals based on the rationale that this was a phase I had better familiarity with, and also based on my feeling that the complexities that high school principals deal with lend themselves to the kind of inquiry with which my study was concerned. However, as I continued to contact the different participants, it became clear that few of the principals available to be interviewed were females and that these females were mostly principals of

primary schools. It was then that I took the decision to include principals of primary schools in order to attempt to address this gender imbalance in my study sample.

In the conceptualisation of this study I decided that I was not going to collect data from the key participants — the school principals — only. The idea was that, in order to get a better sense of whether the objectives of the EMD programmes were aligned with what the principals perceived to be their needs, it would make sense to also interview university lecturing staff who teach in and had designed the EMD programmes. The interviewing of university lecturing staff was also done as a way of remedying what I saw as a weakness identified in the research literature dealing with professional development programmes evaluation studies (for a comprehensive discussion of this aspect see Chapter Two).

Furthermore, I decided to also include as part of my data collection, interviews with key personnel in both the provincial Department of Education and in the national Department of Education. These were individuals who were at the centre of the policy development processes regarding education leadership and management development programmes, and could therefore provide critical insights about the state of affairs both provincially and nationally.

### **3.4 Study sample**

From a target population of all school principals in KZN who had undergone and completed leadership and management development through the three universities' graduate programmes (based on the these various data sources mentioned above), and who had at least more than two years management experience as school principals, a sample of forty-

two (42) principals was chosen through a stratified purposeful sampling process. This number was later reduced to thirty-one (31) participants following discoveries after interviews that some interviewees did not qualify in terms of the set criteria.<sup>26</sup> Although principals who did not satisfy the criteria set out at the beginning of the study were interviewed, the data pertaining to their interviews was not included in the study<sup>27</sup>. Eleven of those principals fell into this category.

The sample for the major participants of this study — school principals — was obtained by a process of stratified purposeful sampling. According to Fraenkel and Wallen (2006), the advantage of stratified purposeful sampling is that it increases the likelihood of representativeness, especially if one's sample is not very large. It, according to these authors, virtually ensures that all key characteristics of individuals in the population are included in the same proportions in the sample.

The stratified purposeful sampling procedure — which according to Tashakkori and Teddlie (2009) is a commonly used sampling technique — was used in order to ensure the selection of cases showing combinations of pre-selected variables (years of experience and the period of the attainment of the qualification). According to Fogelman (2002), this type of sampling is often preferred because it is more likely to result in a sample which is representative of the population being studied.

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<sup>26</sup> For example, I only discovered during the interviews that some principals had not received their qualifications from the universities of Kwa-Zulu Natal as set out in the criteria (4 participants); that their BEd (Honours)/Masters was not in Educational Management (2 participants); or that they had not benefited from any formal management training (5 principals). When I made these discoveries in the middle of the interview, I felt that it was only fair to proceed with the interview – especially given the enthusiasm exhibited by the principals to participate in the study — and then not include the data collected in those particular interviews as part of the findings of the study.

<sup>27</sup> Therefore the data presented in this study are based on the thirty-one interviews conducted with school principals.

Once this target population had been established and the sample selected through stratified purposeful sampling, the selected school principals were contacted by telephonic means (and where necessary, followed up by contacts in writing — mainly through the use of faxes) to establish their willingness and availability to participate in this study. Depending on their willingness, availability and on their compliance with the criteria for participation in this study, prior to the commencement of the interviews principals were provided with the Human Subjects Consent to Participate Form (see Appendix E) which they were asked to sign if they had no objections or problems with participating in the interview. Among other things, this form contains a brief description of the study and its purpose.

With regards to the sampling in so far as the university lecturing staff were concerned, this was based purely on their being heads of departments and teaching in these programmes. The extra university lecturing staff member interviews that were conducted were mainly based on these members being responsible for the coordination of the EMDPs and on their willingness and availability to be interviewed.

### **3.5 Data collection techniques**

Document analysis, content analysis of the research literature and interviews were the main techniques used to look into the perceptions of school principals with regards to the practical relevance of education management development programmes in South Africa's province of KwaZulu-Natal. While the general concern in the study is the extent to which education management development programmes in South Africa's KZN meet the schools and principals' needs given the new conditions that exist in the country, the following sub-questions are also given consideration in the study:

- a) What is the nature of EMDPs presently in South Africa, particularly in the province of KwaZulu-Natal?
- b) With what types of environments are EMDPs equipping principals to deal?
- c) With what kinds of challenges do principals have to contend in schools under the new prevailing conditions?
- d) What are the perception of school principals of the strengths and limitations of the education management development programmes in terms of meeting their needs?

With regards to the first sub-question — *what is the nature of EMDPs presently in South Africa, particularly in KwaZulu-Natal?* — it is my belief that before one can attempt to examine the extent to which principal professional development in SA (or specifically in KZN) is geared towards meeting schools and principals needs in dealing with the challenges that exist today, it is imperative to get a general sense of the nature of EMDPs that are being offered presently in the country, particularly in the province of KZN. Among other things, this will help us determine the extent to which there has been a shift (or lack thereof) in terms of the kind of EMDPs being offered presently in juxtaposition to those that were provided during the apartheid era; and to ascertain the extent to which these EMDPs have responded to the changed conditions existing in schools presently. To answer this question, a number of approaches were used, namely, the identification, search and analysis of documents from sources such as the universities' Departments of Education Management and Leadership, provincial and national Departments of Education and from the research literature. Individual interviews with key personnel from these institutions were then conducted to further get answers to this question.

The second sub-question — *with what types of environments are EMDPs equipping principals to deal?* — is related to sub-question 1) in the sense that it explores the direction that EMDPs in KZN are moving towards in terms of the environments for which these programmes are presently equipping principals. The logic behind this question is that

before one can determine the extent to which EMDPs in SA meet the schools and principals' needs, one should get a sense of the types of environments for which these programmes purport to be equipping principals. Over and above doing a content analysis of materials such as syllabi and policy documents from the universities' departments of Education Management and Leadership to attempt to answer this question, individual interviews were conducted with not just heads of departments and (wherever possible) university lecturing staff who teach in these programmes, but also with the principals themselves who had undergone EMDPs. Interviews with principals — which took the form of one-on-one, semi-structured interviews — were important in terms of getting their perceptions of these programmes, which were then juxtaposed with university lecturing staff's perceptions.

The third sub-question — *with what kinds of challenges do principals have to contend in schools under the new prevailing conditions?* — is an attempt to get to the heart of the kind of challenges or vexing problems that principals in SA have to deal with given the new dispensation. Through the review of recent literature that addresses this issue from the South African context, and through principal interviews which offer the perspectives of practitioners in the field, we can begin to gather important insights about the principals' perceptions of the extent to which EMDPs do or do not in fact meet the needs of principals and their schools. In answering this question, university lecturers' perspectives were also solicited in order to get a sense of their perceptions of these issues/problems and the manner in which their programmes purport to respond to these problems or issues.

The fourth sub-question — *what are the perceptions of school principals of the strengths and limitations of EMDPs in terms of meeting their needs?* — is an attempt to identify the limitations of EMDPs and those aspects in these programmes that may be said to assist

principals in dealing with problems identified in the third sub-question, and in responding to the changed conditions that exist in schools presently. This question is of crucial importance in terms of the possible modification or restructuring that may be required of EMDPs. This means that, based on the findings of this study, those aspects identified by principals in the fourth sub-question may be used as a foundation upon which new programmes may be developed. In answering this question, school principals were the major source of information as representatives of “voices from the field.”

Table 1 below, offers the research methodology matrix which aims to show the sources, methods, and the focus of the analysis that was used to provide possible responses to the sub-questions of this study.

**Table 1: The Research Methodology Matrix**

Sub-Questions	Sources	Methods	Focus of the Analysis
1) What is the nature of EMDPs) presently in SA, particularly in the province of KwaZulu-Natal?	University/departmental documents and syllabi	Document search, identification, and analysis	How are EMDPs structured?
	HODs and selected university lecturing staff who teach in EMDPs	One-on-one interviews (semi-structured)	What do the institutions that offer EMDPs see as the objectives of their programmes?
	Policy documents/Reports from the provincial Department of Education (PDE)	Document search, identification, and analysis	What insights can we gather from the research literature?
	Key personnel of the PDE	One-on-one interviews (semi-structured)	Is there any consistency or coherence regarding the structure and delivery of EMDPs across the different institutions that offer EMDPs in South Africa?
	Policy documents/Reports from the national Department of Education (DoE)	Document search, identification, and analysis	Are EMDPs under any regulatory body that provides guidelines for their structure, content and delivery? If so what are these guidelines?
	Key personnel in the DoE	One-on-one interviews (semi-structured)	



			<p>What kinds of instructional approaches are employed in the delivery of EMDPs?</p> <p>What kinds of practical experiences or field-based learning opportunities (e.g., internships), if any, do these programmes provide?</p> <p>What role, if any, do practising or retired school managers play in the professional development of principals?</p> <p>What are the selection and recruitment procedures that are used to attract potential students?</p> <p>Are there any well-articulated standards for entry?</p>
2) With what types of environments are EMDPs equipping principals to deal?	<p>University/departmental documents and syllabi</p> <p>HODs and selected university lecturing staff who teach in EMDPs</p> <p>School principals who have undergone EMDPs</p>	<p>Document search, identification, and analysis</p> <p>One-on-one interviews (semi-structured)</p> <p>One-on-one interviews (semi-structured)</p>	<p>Are there any efforts to link the professional development of principals with the present conditions that exist in schools? What form or shape have these efforts taken?</p> <p>Are EMDPs equipping principals to deal with the current conditions such as diverse student and teacher populations; community and parental participation; shared governance; the implementation of new educational reforms (such as new curriculum initiatives); to manage change and reform efforts effectively etc.?</p>
3) With what kinds of challenges do principals have to contend in schools under the new prevailing conditions?	<p>Review of Literature on South Africa</p> <p>HODs and selected university lecturing staff who teach in EMDPs</p> <p>School principals who have undergone EMDPs</p>	<p>Literature search and review</p> <p>One-on-one interviews (semi-structured)</p> <p>One-on-one interviews (semi-structured)</p>	<p>What do principals perceive to be the most “vexing problems” that they have to deal with in schools?</p> <p>What do the institutions that provide professional development programmes perceive to be the most vexing problems that</p>

			<p>principals have to contend with in schools?</p> <p>In what ways do principals perceive their jobs as having changed since the changes ushered in by the new dispensation in SA?</p> <p>What (coping) strategies have principals developed to deal with these vexing problems?</p>
4) What are the perception of school principals of the strengths and limitations of the EMDPs in terms of meeting their needs?	<p>Review of Literature on South Africa</p> <p>School principals who have undergone EMDPs</p>	<p>Literature search and review</p> <p>One-on-one interviews (semi-structured)</p>	<p>For what aspects of their work do principals feel they have been adequately equipped to deal with the vexing problems that they face?</p> <p>Can principals cite any specific aspects of EMDPs that they feel have adequately equipped them for their roles in schools?</p> <p>Do principals feel that they have been adequately equipped to deal with the changes taking place in schools?</p>

### 3.5.1 Document analysis

As mentioned in Chapter One, the study begins with the content analysis of EMDPs offered in the province of KZN's three universities. In other words, the study commenced with a thorough review and analysis (content analysis) of what these programmes offer with the aim of determining the content and context of EMDPs in KZN. The strengths and weaknesses of these programmes were evaluated against the backdrop of what is postulated in the provincial and national policy documents regarding school leaders' competencies. The fact that these data were collected from three formerly racially and ethnically divided

higher education institutions that were historically meant to cater for the needs of some specific racial and ethnic groups, offers important insights about the content and context of EMDPs in these institutions.

Policy and other documents and reports from both the provincial Department of Education (PDE) and the national Department of Education (DoE)<sup>28</sup> — particularly as these relate to education management development (EMD) in SA — were also gathered and a thorough review and analysis thereof (content analysis) was conducted. It can be argued that these two policy making structures provided important information about the nature of EMD in South Africa and the kind of measures that were being undertaken (if any) to effect changes both nationally and provincially.

### **3.5.2 Interviews**

Miles and Huberman (1994) have argued that in qualitative research the researcher is the primary instrument for data collection. I would further argue that the interview is therefore the major tool in that endeavour. The bulk of the data for this study is derived from interviews. I developed and used different interview protocols or schedules for participants in this study — for the university lecturing staff, key personnel in the provincial and national Departments and for the major participants of this study, the school principals (see Appendix C). In all three cases, I used semi-structured interviews mainly because, among

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<sup>28</sup> Among others, these included: the DoE's: Report of the Task Team on Education Management Development (1996), Guides for School Governing Bodies (1999) and the Guides for School Management Teams (2000); a conference paper co-written by one of the DoE's senior managers entitled: "South African Qualification for Principals: Reality or dream?"; the PDE's: Policy Framework for Education Management Development (1998), Towards effective school management: Manual 1: Effective school leadership and management (2000), Master strategic plan: 2003 – 2006.

other things, they allow for focused, conversational, two-way communication and probing responses.

With the permission and the consent of the interviewees, the interviews were recorded with an audio tape recorder. I then used the services of an experienced data specialist to transcribe the interviews verbatim. To ensure that the data specialist had transcribed the tapes accordingly, I listened to the tapes while going through the transcriptions. After I was satisfied that the transcription was in fact correctly done, I continued with the data analysis process (“continued” because analysing the data had been an ongoing process from the initial data collection stage).

What follows below is a discussion of the interviews with the different participant groups.

### **3.5.3 Interviews with university lecturing staff**

Following the content analysis of leadership and management development programmes offered by the universities in KZN, interviews with heads of departments (HODs) of the relevant university departments that offer EMDPs, were conducted. As already mentioned, where possible, the actual professors or lecturers who teach in these programmes were also interviewed in order to get first hand information about what their programmes entail and what their objectives are in so far as these programmes are concerned. These took the form of one 90-minute semi-structured interview. In cases where this became necessary, brief follow-up (telephonic) interviews — in order to seek further clarification — were also conducted with two of the HODs. With the permission from the participants, all interviews were tape-recorded and later transcribed for analysis. A total of seven participants—3

HODs and 4 university lecturing staff—were interviewed: One HOD (Mr Cebekhulu) and one university lecturing staff (Mr. Bopape) from the University of Port Shepstone; one HOD (Prof. Battersby) and one university lecturing staff (Ms. Jiyane) from the University of Melmoth North Campus; one university lecturing staff (Dr. Kutumile) from the University of Melmoth South Campus; one HOD (Prof. Qwabe) from Montclair University South Campus (who is also the Dean of Faculty), and one university lecturing staff member (Prof. Ndebele) from Montclair University North Campus (who is also the Deputy Dean)<sup>29</sup>. Due to the fact that one of the university lecturing staff members (Dr. Kutumile) was on leave away from SA, an “electronic-mail interview” was conducted where interview questions were sent and received by electronic-mail.

The reason why interviews with the HODs and lecturers/professors who teach in these programmes were deemed crucial is because it can be argued that they (the HODs) are well placed to give the necessary information on what these programmes really offer or purport to offer. This implies inquiring into the actual state of EMDPs by juxtaposing what the programmes profess to offer with what the literature postulates — the desired elements of preparation programmes in educational management (Murphy, 1993) — and what the school principals consider to be of critical importance for their practices in schools. Granted that there may be variations in terms of the desired elements of EMDPs in South Africa at this particular juncture in its historical development, one can strongly argue that what is postulated in the literature may resonate, to a large extent, with what the professional development of school managers in South Africa require. The fact that the views of the programme providers are further juxtaposed with the perceptions of school principals

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<sup>29</sup> All pseudonyms.

allows this study to transcend the common “check list” approach that characterises a large number of studies of this nature.

This inquiry was done with the aim of later ascertaining whether there is a need for overhauling some of the methods or aspects of the curriculum used in the professional development of principals in KZN. As has been mentioned, the data collected from the content analysis of EMDPs and the interviews with the heads of departments and professors were later juxtaposed with the data from interviews with the school principals. This was done in order to determine the extent to which there is congruence (or incongruence) between the university faculty’s perceptions of their programmes on one hand, and practising principals’ perceptions on the other hand, of the benefits of these programmes as related to their practices in schools.

In order to enrich my understanding of the issues I had discovered during interviews with principals and university lecturing staff, I also interviewed one of the well-respected educational commentators and critics in the country, Prof. Jonathan Jansen<sup>30</sup> (real name), who provided some insightful comments and suggestions regarding what he called “three levels of explanation” regarding the findings.

#### **3.5.4 Interviews with key personnel in PDE and DoE**

Following the content analysis of documents and reports from the provincial Department of Education (PDE) and from the national Department of Education (DoE), interviews with key personnel who have responsibility for education management development (EMD), were conducted. These interviews were conducted with the Chief Director of the Education

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<sup>30</sup> It should be mentioned that at this stage I was still registered with the State University of New York at Buffalo (SUNY-Buffalo) as a doctoral student and Prof. Jansen was not my supervisor.

Management Directorate of the PDE, Dr. Dennis McGregor (pseudonym), and with the Director of Education Management and Governance Development and District Development (EMGDDD) Directorate of the DoE, Mr. Bruce Shaw (pseudonym). These are individuals who are directly involved, *inter alia*, with policy development and practice in the professional development of principals.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with both Dr. McGregor and Mr. Shaw. Dr. McGregor's interview took 45 minutes while the interview with Mr. Shaw lasted for almost 2 hours (110 minutes). Both these interviews were tape-recorded and later transcribed for the analysis of the data. The rationale behind conducting interviews with these key individuals is that since they are at the centre of developments regarding the professional development of principals, they may be said to be well placed to provide the necessary and current information about the state-of-the-art of EMDPs not only in the province, but also nationally.

### **3.5.5 Interviews with school principals**

Individual or one-on-one semi-structured interviews were conducted with school principals. Through a process of stratified purposeful sampling, a total of thirty-one (31) principals were selected — while taking care to control for representation of principals from all the former racially divided departments of education in KZN, and for the rural-urban-suburban divide. These one-on-one interviews with principals — which were tape-recorded and later transcribed for analysis — were between 30 to 45 minutes in duration. There were, however, instances where the interview went beyond the 30- to 45-minute time frame to 60 minutes, particularly with those principals who had quite a lot to say and who saw the

interview as an opportunity to express their frustrations and concerns regarding the challenges they face in the post-apartheid period.

All the interviews were conducted within the school setting — mainly in the principals' offices in cases where the principal had an office — which, I should add, were at times prone to disturbances and constant disruptions — and at times convenient to the principals. Although conducting the interviews within the school setting and (in some instances) during the school time was accompanied by problems particularly in terms of disturbances, it ensured that the principals could easily reflect on issues that confront them while in their natural working settings. In order to allow a high level of comfort, principals who expressed themselves in their mother tongues (mainly in IsiZulu) were encouraged and allowed to do so.

### **3.5.6 Focus group interviews with school principals**

When the study was conceptualised focus group interviews with a selection of school principals, were part of the planned data collection strategies. However, due to the difficulties experienced with trying to gather principals for focus group interviews — precipitated, *inter alia*, by the challenges that principals in KZN were faced with during the period in which I collected the data — it became impossible to conduct these kinds of interviews. Amongst other things, the transition and implementation period under which principals were operating placed numerous demands on principals requiring them to constantly attend the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education and Culture's (KZNDEC) workshops, meetings, report to District offices, and so on.

The fact that focus group interviews were eventually not conducted does not make the findings of this study less significant, particularly given the fact that these interviews were envisaged mainly as supplementary to one-on-one interviews. Also, the fact that thirty one principals were interviewed, thus resulting in substantially large amounts of data, assisted in terms of making the impact of not conducting focus group interviews less significant.

### **3.6 Research instruments**

The research instruments for this study entailed three sets of interview schedules and document analysis protocol. The first interview schedule was utilised in order to record the responses of the HODs of the relevant university departments and professors or lecturers who teach in these programmes. The second interview schedule was for senior personnel in the PDE and in the DoE. The third interview schedule was used to record the responses of practising school principals who formed part of the sample of this study. A document analysis protocol was drawn up for use in the analysis of documents from the provincial and national departments of education, and the documents pertaining to professional development programmes offered in the province's universities (focusing on syllabi, course outlines, departmental vision and mission statements, faculty calendars, etc.).

A research log was also used in order to record and document all interactions relating to gaining entry to the sites, finding participants who were willing to participate in the study, and any problems or pertinent issues regarding data collection. Most importantly, it was also used as a self-reflective tool — in other words I recorded my self-reflective processes as a researcher (researcher reflection) as the research evolved, and documented some of the changes (e.g., the change in the use of focus group interviews, the

inclusion of extra questions in the interview schedule for school principals, and so on) necessitated by some unanticipated circumstances in the field or a re-think on my part, which required a change in the direction and focus of the research.

### **3.7 Data analysis strategies**

First and foremost, it should be mentioned that the data from the interviews, the research log, and the policy and other documents, were put through an on-going process of analysis. In other words, the analysis process began as soon as the research commenced and continued throughout the data collection process.

In the case of the interview data, following the first interviews that I conducted with school principals, I went through the audio-tape and my field notes in an effort to analyse aspects of the interviews that needed to be changed and improved upon. Based on this initial analysis, I then began to modify some aspects of the interview schedule.

As recommended by Bogdan and Biklen (1992), the initial step in the analysis of the copious pages of the different data sets (university faculty interviews, two personnel in the two departments of education, and principal interviews) involved going over the data at least thrice. Initially this involved listening to the audio-tapes while reading through the transcripts in order to ensure that the transcripts had fully captured what was said during the interviews, and to begin to make sense of the enormous data.

Following the transcription of all the data from the interviews (from university faculty, the two key personnel in the PDE and the DoE, and from school principals), it was analysed using a grounded theory approach to data analysis. I developed a three-column

matrix where on the first column I placed the different interviews with the participants, indicating the date, setting/place, key research question and the participants' pseudonyms. In the second column I then started 'plotting in' the different possible codes derived from the interviews — a process Strauss and Corbin (1998) refer to as “open coding.” Initially the list of codes was indeed very long, but I was later able to refine/narrow down the list of codes. In the third column I included memos — both personal and theoretical memos, where I reflected on particular codes, and in some instances began to provide possible hunches based on the interview data. From the different codes I had developed, I was able to establish a number of categories. Out of the categories a number of themes began to emerge, which yielded noteworthy insights about the interview data that I had collected.

With specific reference to the data from the interviews with school principals, the common themes were clustered together in order to develop a taxonomy of all common statements regarding the principals' experiences within the changed conditions. Once these statements had been analysed following the establishment of themes, the next step was to focus on the significance of the principals' statements in relation to their practices in school, and to the EMDPs that they had undergone. In other words, the statements were analysed to ascertain the extent to which their professional development allows them to deal with the challenges that the new conditions present. All this was done with the overall aim of ascertaining what meanings principals give to their experiences of EMDPs, and to what extent these meanings can be useful in terms of their juxtaposition with the principals' practices in school?

### **3.8 Reliability and validity (trustworthiness and dependability) concerns**

In qualitative research reliability usually refers to the extent to which the research has “dependability” (Lincoln and Guba, 1985: 300) and “trustworthiness” (Seale, 1999: 266). Validity on the other hand refers to issues of “quality”, “rigour” and the extent to which a study was conducted as part of “proper research” (Stenbacka, 2001: 551). I use these concepts (reliability and validity) with the full understanding that some researchers have expressed their apprehension about the use of such concepts in qualitative research and have therefore made attempts to coin alternative concepts (Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Seale, 1999; Stenbacka, 2001). Merriam (1995) has rightly argued that qualitative research is based on different assumptions regarding reality and therefore requires different conceptualisation of reliability and validity. I, however, take cognisance of what I consider to be a critical assertion by Lincoln and Guba (1985: 316) that: “[S]ince there can be no validity without reliability, a demonstration of the former [validity] is sufficient to establish the latter [reliability].” In the present study I have attempted to address mainly validity concerns in line with Lincoln and Guba’s afore-mentioned statement.

Merriam (1995) proposes a variety of approaches in an effort to address reliability and validity concerns in qualitative research. These include triangulation (e.g., use of multiple sources of data), member checks, peer/colleague examination, thick description, multi-site designs, sampling within, and modal comparison. In the present study, a variety of these approaches were utilised.

Data for this study were collected from various sources, i.e., school principals, university lecturers and education (both national and provincial) department officials. This could be regarded as a form of triangulation as these different sources of data assisted in

placing the perception of school principals within proper perspective (the context in which EMDPs are developed and presented and the policy environment underpinning the professional development of school principals).

With regards to peer/colleague examination, prior to conducting the research I asked two professors of education — one of whom is a well-respected academic in the area of education leadership and management, based overseas, and the other, also a well-respected scholar in the broad field of education policy and change, locally (South Africa) based — for feedback regarding my research methodology. I asked these professors to comment particularly about the research questions. On the basis of their comments I then made and incorporated the suggested changes into the study.

Furthermore, after the field work had been completed, I presented a paper on the preliminary findings at the 8<sup>th</sup> International Education Management Association of South Africa (EMASA) Conference held in 2004 in East London, South Africa. This conference presented a perfect stage for me on which to test not only the claims that I was making, but also the soundness of the study. What made the conference presentation even more insightful was that beyond the international and local attendees who provided invaluable feedback, some university lecturing staff (three in total) from the institutions where the data had been collected, were in attendance at the Conference and also provided critical comments. Also present at the Conference were a number of school principals (five in total) who had participated in the study as interviewees, who also commented outside the session in which I had presented the then tentative findings of the study. Again, all this feedback was incorporated into the study.

The “member-checks” technique was also utilised in this study — albeit in a limited fashion. I managed to ask only five principals in the sample of the study to check and comment on the accuracy of the data I had collected. I also asked them to comment on the preliminary findings that I was highlighting. As indicated above, a further 5 principals who attended the conference in which I presented the paper based on the preliminary findings, also got a chance to provide their inputs about the research. Although the total number of principals who were asked to comment on the interpretation of the data is limited (10 out of 31), the views of these principals provided an important validity measure. Given the number of participants (school principals in particular) that I interviewed and the limitations in the resources, I was not able to send the interview data and the preliminary findings to all the participants.

Finally, the use of thick descriptions of the voices of school principals regarding their perceptions of the benefits of education management development programmes for their practice in schools, are presented as one of the strengths of this study.

### **3.9 Ethical concerns**

According to Welman, Kruger and Mitchell (2005), the general principles invoked in codes of research ethics are that no harm should befall the research subjects and that human subjects should take part freely based on informed consent. In this study ethical concerns were addressed through a variety of ways. At one level, an informed consent form that was designed and administered to all participants prior to their participation in the study clearly stated that there were no risks — actual or potential — that might result from participation in the study. Furthermore, participants were made aware that their participation in the

study was voluntary and that they had a right to withdraw their participation at any stage of the research without any adverse consequences.

At another level, ethical considerations had to do with the anonymity of the participants. Cohen *et al.* (2000: 61-62) posit that the essence of anonymity is that information provided by participants should in no way reveal their identity. They further argue that the principal means of ensuring anonymity is not using the names of the participants or any other personal means of identification. In the current study the issue of anonymity was addressed through the use of aliases in the place of the participants' names and the universities in which they work. As alluded to by Frankfort-Nachmias and Nachmias (1992, cited by Cohen, Marion and Morrison, 2000), to further enhance anonymity, the names of the participants and their institutions were linked by code alphabets (Frankfort-Nachmias and Nachmias suggest code numbers), and once the data had been prepared for analysis, the identifying information was separated from the research data.

I am of the belief that I took enough precautions in addressing the ethical concerns and that I did everything in my power to uphold the general principles of research ethics. Even instances where the identifying information was unavoidably difficult to conceal (e.g., the fact that there was only one Chief Director in Provincial Education Management Directorate), I still made every effort to conceal the identity of the individual concerned.

### **3.10 Conclusion**

With the advent of the new dispensation in SA, school managers — particularly principals — have found themselves having to contend with a plethora of different issues and challenges that require different strategies and a different educational management knowledge base. Leadership and management development programmes (EMDPs) are central towards the goal of assisting school principals to deal effectively with these changed conditions in schools.

Through the use of a document analysis and qualitative research design — utilising document analysis and interview methods — the study attempted to explore the extent to which principal professional development in SA meets school and principal needs given the new conditions that exist in the country. By engaging in a thorough review and analysis of documents and literature; eliciting the perspectives of not only principals, but also faculty who teach in EMDPs, and the key personnel in the provincial Department of Education (PDE) and in the national Department of Education (DoE), this study aimed to provide valuable insights which might help in the modification of existing programmes and the development of new ones.

It is hoped that the combination of the research strategies that were employed to gather and analyse the data yielded important insights that can help to stimulate and inform policy debates in SA regarding the professional development of school managers such as principals. In the next chapter, a descriptive analysis of the data emanating from the inquiry is presented.