Chapter

5

FINDINGS ON SCHOOL PRINCIPALS' CHALLENGES AND THEIR PERCEPTIONS OF THE VALUE OF EMDPs IN THEIR PRACTICES

5.1   Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to present, explain and analyse data in respect of the key participants' (school principals') understandings of the challenges with which they have to contend given the new conditions prevailing in schools post 1994; and the extent to which they feel adequately equipped to deal with these challenges. This purpose is in line with the broader concern of this study which is to determine the links between formal education management development programmes and the needs of school principals.

In this chapter I probe the degree to which school principals perceive the leadership and management development programmes (EMDPs) that they have undergone to be effective or not, together with the reasons behind their perceptions. The sub-questions that are addressed in this chapter are the following:

i)   *With what kinds of challenges do principals have to contend in schools under the new prevailing conditions?*
ii)   *What types of environments are EMDPs equipping principals to deal with?*

iii)   *What are the perceptions of school principals of the strengths and limitations of the education management development programmes in terms of meeting their needs?*

The perspectives of school principals concerning the leadership and management development programmes, are then presented. I begin by looking at the changes that school principals have experienced in their leadership and management of schools in the pre- and post-1994 period in South Africa. This is followed by a discussion of the vexing challenges with which school principals have to contend under the changed conditions that are prevailing in schools. The focusing question that this section of the chapter attempts to address is: *What changes have you observed in the management of your school in terms of the challenges that you dealt with pre-1994 and the challenges that you have to deal with post-1994? To what do you attribute these changes?*

In the next section of the chapter I then explore school principals' perceptions of the relevance of EMDPs in relation to their leadership and management roles as principals of schools. It is in this section of the chapter where I also explore those aspects of EMDPs that school principals felt had equipped them to deal effectively with the post-1994 challenges in their schools.

Following a focus on principals' perceptions regarding the relevance of EMDPs in relation to their roles as school principals, I then explore the question of whether school principals felt adequately equipped to lead and manage schools effectively in the post-1994 conditions that exist in their schools. The above-mentioned question was coupled with a question that sought to determine whether school principals felt adequately equipped to manage change in their schools.

Another aspect that I address in this chapter is the issue of the extent to which EMDPs that are reviewed in this study offered participants practical or field-based learning opportunities. A focus on the practical or field-based learning opportunities was done in the context of what the research literature has postulated in terms of the importance of these experiences in the development of school principals.

Given the different views expressed by school principals regarding the relevance of EMDPs for principals' school practices, I felt it prudent to also get a sense of what school principals considered to be their greatest professional needs. It is in that context that there is a section in the chapter that looks into school principals' greatest professional needs, particularly given the changed conditions in which they have to operate.

During interviews with school principals, two critical themes that were initially not part of the interview schedule for this study, emerged. One was the question of the role of training workshops in the professional development of school principals, and the other was the role of experiences beyond EMDPs concerning principal effectiveness. Due to the importance of these two themes and the fact that they seemed to have been regarded as important by the participants in this study, the school principals — particularly given the extent to which they addressed themselves to these issues — I dedicated two sections in this chapter to these issues.

With regards to the issue of training workshops, school principals made recommendations for the improvement of workshops. Therefore, a section detailing these recommendations is also provided in the chapter. Regarding the latter issue — the role of experiences beyond EMDPs — this became even more critical, particularly in the context of the latest research literature review by Levin (2006). The chapter ends with a summary

of the key findings emanating from the data presented in the different themes detailing school principals' understandings of the challenges and changes that they have to deal with, and their perceptions about the value of EMDPs in KZN.

5.2   Participants' (school principals') profile

As indicated earlier, a total of forty-two (42) principals were interviewed but data reported in this study are based on the thirty-one (31) school principals who made up the sample of this study. Almost all the participants (twenty-five out of thirty-one principals) had Teachers' Diplomas mostly acquired at the erstwhile Teachers' Colleges of Education (Springfield, Indumiso, Mpumalanga, Umbumbulu and Ntuzuma) and at a technikon (ML Sultan Technikon). A few principals (5 out of 31) had Post-Graduate Diplomas in Education (such as the HDE (Higher Education Diploma), the UHDE (University Higher Diploma in Education) and the UED (University Education Diploma)) acquired mostly following a Bachelor's degree qualification. Seven school principals in the current study had doctoral degrees in education management/leadership – two were excluded from the study since one doctoral degree was not acquired in the three universities in KZN and the other was not in educational management/leadership. Over and above their educational qualifications, three principals in the sample also had qualifications outside of education, for example, an Advanced Diploma in Public Administration, a Masters in Public Administration, and a Bachelor of Commerce degree.

In terms of gender, there were ten (10) females and twenty one (21) males. In terms of race, there were sixteen Africans, fourteen "Indians", only one "Coloured" and no White school principals.

The age of the participants in this study ranged from 32 to 56 years, with most of the interviewees falling in the 35 to 45 years age bracket (the median age of the participants was 44). With regards to years of experience in the principal's position, this ranged from 3 to 16 years — with most principals falling in the 3 to 9 years bracket — and a median of 6 years.

It should be mentioned though, that there were a few "outliers" who fell outside of this range — for example, one principal had been in the position for 16 years, while three had been in the principalship for 11, 12 and 14 years respectively. All the principals in the study had experiences in one or all of the positions in school management (head of department, deputy principal, and principal), and had spent considerable time (ranging between 4 and 23 years) in these positions before becoming principals. Not all the principals in the study had progressively gone through all the steps — for example, some had moved from being an educator to head of department, to principal without having been deputy principal. A number of the principals (twenty-one out of thirty-one) had been in some acting position or another in the school before assuming the position of school principal.

Finally, in as far as the total number of years in the teaching profession is concerned, the participants' years ranged from 6 to 37 years, with a median of 21 and a-half years. In essence, the school principals in the sample of this study were principals who had been in the education profession for a considerable amount of time and who therefore had substantial experience. Despite their vast experiences, they had seen the need to embark upon some professional development in the form of the programmes offered by universities in KZN.

In the next section of this chapter I look at the perspectives of school principals regarding the changes that they have experienced in the pre- and post-1994 conditions that exist in schools. This is done with a view to later determining the extent to which the EMDPs have equipped school principals to deal with these changes effectively.

5.3 Changes in the leadership and management of schools pre- and post-1994

As a precursor to the question of the types of environments with which the school principals were equipped to deal, I asked the participants about how they saw changes in their jobs/roles from the pre-1994 period to the post-1994 era. I first asked the principals whether they had been in the principalship prior to the changes that took place in the country in 1994. A majority of the principals (23 out of 31) had in fact been principals prior to 1994, while others were part of the school management team (SMT) but not necessarily serving as school principals. I then asked those who had been in the principal positions as to:

What changes have you observed in the management of your school in terms of the challenges that you dealt with pre-1994 and the challenges that you have to deal with post-1994? To what do you attribute these changes?

Not unexpected, all the principals who had been principals prior to 1994 recognised the fact that the conditions under which they were required to operate were fundamentally different from those in which they operated in the past prior to the dawn of the new dispensation in South Africa. These principals indicated that there were tremendous changes and major challenges. As one principal put it:

> …it seems as if the transformation came up with new challenges. Like it became a challenge to principals to become open and transparent, to do everything in consultation, you see, because now they cannot take decisions unilaterally, you have to consult first and ask for involvement of other ideas from other people, which was not there before (Interview, School Principal 7).

And another principal indicated how he sees his job as having changed from what it used to require in the past — transcending management:

> Look, I think my job has moved from being a pure manager of the school to a more elaborate one because there has to be a great deal of bridging to be done in terms of parents, in terms of learners themselves – they all come from different cultural backgrounds – I found that I had to do much more than being office based and looking at the curriculum, it had to be, I had to work with human beings and from a human resource point of view it had to be done, it had to be done (Interview, School Principal 3).

It was, however, how the different principals conceptualised and discussed the conditions under which they had worked prior to 1994 and in the post-1994 conditions, that was informative. Principals in this study spoke about the challenges that they have had to deal with, such as having to share their (decision-making) powers with the other stakeholders that they did not have to share power with prior to 1994. To illustrate the point, one school principal referred to the difficulty that some of the principals have had in accepting parents as important role players in the decision making processes of the school:

> At the moment there's still a lot of suspicions between principals and parents; parents suddenly have this vast area of legislation that they can come in and believe 'we've taken over the school.' Principals on the other hand are saying 'who the hell are these guys, they used to be fund raisers in the past now they're taking over our turf.' So we've got to shift that thinking, that is one of our challenges… (Interview, School Principal 28).

In fact, I would argue that in essence the challenge of engaging in shared decision making and shared governance is one area that has contributed to problems in schools, mainly because most principals were used to managing schools alone, and with the post-1994

changes, they were forced to engage in shared leadership/shared decision making. This fact

was readily acknowledged by one of the principals who pointed out that:

> There have been changes, the role of the principal—before principals used to dictate, in the past you couldn't challenge them. It was only principals' ideas that were used in school. Right now the changes that are there are that now discussions about issues take place – of course the principal still needs to give direction – but things are discussed and the decisions are taken by consensus so that those decisions are owned by those affected by them. The school is now owned by all who belong to it, whereas before the principal used to say that he owns the school, and his word was final (Interview, School Principal 13).

The above sentiments were supported by another principal who alluded to the challenge for

some principals to engage in shared decision making:

> The authority of the principal was challenged and the principals themselves were now caught in a dilemma where all of a sudden their authorities are undermined, when they've grown up in a situation where the principal had the voice, the authority and all of a sudden he has no authority, he has got to open up, include other people before he can take a decision (Interview, School Principal 30).

Another area that was highlighted by school principals as reflecting the changes that have

taken place in education, was the involvement of learners — particularly high school

learners — in the decision making processes of the school:

> In the past as learners all they could do was go and complain to the principal if they had a problem, now the highest organisation in the school, the school governing body, has learner representative on it that are full decision makers – of course excluding financial matters and legal matters – but they're full scale decision makers. So now we have to take learners more seriously in schools because they, by law, are entitled to be part of this process on the highest decision making body (Interview, School Principal 16).

There were principals who expressed a certain measure of frustration regarding the new

conditions that they found themselves having to deal with – or as one of the principals put

it, having to "cope with." In fact, I detected from the tone of this particular principal's

expressions some frustration during the interview. I noted these observations on my research log. This particular principal's response went something like this:

> Let's put it this way, prior to 1994 the authority of the principal was absolute, the principal, if there was an errant teacher the principal could just rap him on his knuckles and tell him "shut up and get out, do you want to work here, you do it the way we want it done." Likewise with a pupil, if a learner is problematic whether the learner is right or wrong, you could still call him, give him six of the best and "get out from here." *But now with all this democracy that is coming in,* he has to be very careful how he talks to the teacher, so he has to cope with unionism on the part of the teacher, he has to cope with all that apathy that comes into our teaching, right, *he has to cope with the greater realization of the rights amongst children….so the principal, you know, has to cope with all these changing circumstances*" (My emphasis) (Interview, School Principal 15).

I found it to be of interest that School Principal 15's perceptions of the changes were couched in terms of the language of "coping." The fact that he used the word "cope" four different times in this particular instance, instead of a less emotive word such as to "deal" with, is significant. It captures the general feelings expressed by those school principals in this study who saw the changes as posing major challenges that school principals believed they had to cope with.

Later on in the interview School Principal 15 expressed further frustrations and seemed to intimate that the ways of doing things in the past produced results, whereas today's ways have a tendency of leaving matters unresolved. As he put it:

> …when [the principal] goes home in the afternoon there are lot of things that perhaps aren't resolved, like, eh… those days to resolve a thing means calling somebody and scolding the person, but you can't just call anyone and scold a person today (Interview, School Principal 15).

Asked about some of the challenges that he had experienced post-1994, another principal (School Principal 24) also indicated that he found the whole issue of children's rights problematic. This principal suggested that there was a link between an emphasis on

children's rights and the problems of learner discipline that schools were experiencing as a result of the banning of corporal punishment. [43] In fact, he expressed a sense of loss of power due to the changes that have taken places following the new dispensation in SA – an emphasis on children's rights being one of the examples. As he put it:

> Then comes—I won't say this is a problem, you know—the whole thing about child[ren's] rights, discipline is suffering as a result of that, it is a problem at this stage as absolute authority of the principal is taken away (Interview, School Principal 24).

Some principals in this study did not hide the fact that they had problems with the new ways of doing things in school. One such principal sounded quite cynical in his views about involving others in the decision making processes (shared decision making):

> Well, you see [shared decision making] is evolving because whilst in the past the principal could take the decision on his own, shared decision-making is [now] the order of the day. Whether or not those people on the school management team are capable of making the correct decision is another story. But the fact is you have to take almost every matter that affects the running of the school to the school management team [SMT] and to the staff. Even if it is informing them that this is what's going to happen, this is the way I see it's going to be done (Interview, School Principal 29).

If one considers closely the views of School Principal 29, particularly the last sentence in this cited paragraph above, it is susceptible to numerous interpretations, one of which could be indicative of a contrived kind of shared decision making that he believes in or even, perhaps, practises. In other words, one can argue that this principal engages in shared decision making as a 'window dressing exercise' when in fact he had already made up his mind about "the way… it's going to be done" — in other words, his way. This is just but one way of looking at the utterances of this particular school principal in an effort to

---

[43] Interestingly enough, during the interview with this principal he also expressed the notion that teachers had "lost control" due to OBE.

understand how school principals have dealt with the changes brought about by the post-1994 conditions that exist in schools.

Interesting enough, the perceptions of such school principals who tended to see the involvement of other role players in decisions as a challenge are in direct contrast with the views of progressive and transformative principals who exhibited a good understanding of situational leadership – as discussed later in this chapter.

Half of the "Indian" principals (7 out of 14 "Indian" principals) in this study — heading schools that were previously exclusively "Indian" in their composition due to the apartheid system of separate development — whose schools had accepted and enrolled "African" learners, alluded to the challenges of working with learners from diverse cultural backgrounds. One principal explained how the differences in cultures could be easily misconstrued based on what is practised in a culture with which one is familiar:

> I should say for this transformation period [principals] should be able to cope with the different cultural groups that we have…. I for example, I didn't know that when we talk to an African child he bends, looks down and in our culture it says when you talk to someone they must look straight. So, now those little… but important things which we should know that we have to treat children differently and we can't just reprimand them if they don't look at you and you think, they bend, that they're not respectful but they are, they're not disrespectful (Interview, School Principal 4).

Another principal echoed the above sentiments. But he began by giving some background as to why he had a lack of understanding of other cultural groups:

> I lack working with different cultures, I was always educated in Indian mentality, you went to an Indian University, you went to an Indian College and you came out as an Indian educator, for a particular sector of the community. I was not given any training when this adjustment took place from racism to a multi-racial society (Interview, School Principal 2).

He then went on to cite an example of how his lack of understanding of multiculturalism

had manifested itself in practice:

> I used to go to a Black kid in my school and he stares me in the eye, when he looks with his head down when I'm questioning him about something I thought he was stubborn yet that was a form of cultural acceptance of loyalty to the questioner, obedience, yet I almost struck the child because I wasn't made [aware] of these various cultural values, you know what I'm saying (Interview, School Principal 2).

This principal indicated that he thought "multiculturalism has to be discussed together with

the agenda of equity."

Another principal in this study described how he had in fact assisted his staff members to

understand some cultural aspects from the African culture:

> Then there's this other thing where, I started actually to advise staff on customs and traditions and what little I know about Zulu customs and things like that. For example, if a child had—we had a child that passed on recently and the kids wanted to go to the house [of the child who passed on] and they had to go and give the *mnikelo* [contributions] and things like that. So I had to organise that. Now my staff would not understand that, so now you've got to educate them, so that in a way is a reform (Interview, School Principal 16).

I should mention that there was one principal in this group of "Indian" principals who

indicated that his school did not have any problems with dealing with learners from diverse

cultural/racial background because of his school's long history of opening admission to

African learners. As he put it:

> …the integration of the different pupils…. I think _____ [name of the school] was lucky in a sense that we started our integration pre-1994 where we started, I think _____ [name of the school] I'm subject to correction, was one of the first schools that started integrating pupils of different race groups in _____ [name of the area]. I think we learnt a lot at that particular time to accept different cultures—and I think lots of schools that are facing problems today with the different race groups that they have and how to deal with children, we faced then (Interview, School Principal 12).

Amongst the school principals that I interviewed, there were school principals (13 out of 31), both experienced principals with more than ten years experience in the principalship, and novice principals with less than six years of experience, who displayed a good discernment of the changes that have taken place regarding the job of a school principals, in contrast to the manner in which principals used to operate in the past. I call these "progressive and transformative" school principals. These principals seem to have "transcend[ed] the boundaries of their training and [were] able [to] imaginatively and courageously" deal with the changed conditions in their schools (Sarason, 1996: 5). One such principal in this study argued that:

> Before 1994… the principals were quite autocratic and it was, eh, the principal – probably this is not a pleasant thing to say – but was sort of somebody who was just implementing what the Department was formulating, Department formulated, principal implemented... But there has been this great change now that one cannot, it would not, and probably at that time it worked because teachers followed their principals, but I think people have become more critical about education and leaders of course or managers—I mean if you want to be a leader you have to change your attitude and be more democratic and include people in decision making (Interview, School Principal 9).

I would argue that this kind of acknowledgement of the way that school principals used to operate in the past is quite important mainly because in discussions about how school principals ought to lead and manage schools presently, there is a tendency to lose sight of the history of school management in South Africa, and therefore a failure to understand resistance to change within a particular context. The assumption is that all principals changed when the new changes were ushered in, in the country and in the education system. The reality of the situation is that not all school principals who were part of the previous education dispensation have found it easy to make the necessary changes in the manner in which they lead and manage schools – as seen in the previous discussion of this section.

What is notable from the interviews is that the progressive and transformative principals spoke the language of transformational and distributed leadership, and expressed the need for a paradigm shift in the manner that schools ought to be led and managed under the post-apartheid conditions. As one principal who had been in school management for a total of fourteen years and a teacher for thirty years, indicated:

> The most important thing [is that] we look at discussion with the SMT [School Management Team], with all role-players. We believe that when a decision is taken in a problem area we need to get all role-players involved simply because for effective answers you need all role-players to buy in and take ownership of a problem and to find solutions. So we start off with parents, educators, learners, discussing what the problems are, how best we should handle the problems, whether it's a small little problem it must be handled. And by that way we are able to disseminate information of the decisions taken to all role-players in the form of letters to parents, in the form of discussions to educators and assembly talks to learners. (Interview, School Principal 3).

To this and the other progressive and transformative principals, involvement of all the stakeholders in the decision making process of managing and leading the school was not an option, but a necessity.

There were other principals in this group of "progressive and transformative" school principals who indicated that they actually cherished the opportunity to engage in shared decision making — opportunities that were missing in the past. In response to the question of whether he had struggled to make a paradigm shift towards shared decision making, one principal responded thus:

> No, I did not see it [shared decision making] as a problem because I found that I was denied that opportunity in the past and for the things that I was striving for where we had to be transparent, free, and had to take into account all role players and the decision taken there will be more meaningful and forceful when all are given the opportunity and that was what I was striving for in the past where decisions were taken for the people not by the people (Interview, School Principal 31).

While acknowledging the importance of involving all stakeholders in the decision making processes of the school, some principals also pointed out the importance of the school leader — the principal — to be decisive at times and to actually make the decisions when the need arises. As one principal contended:

> ...there is this change which I don't know is really happening in all schools but I can talk for my school, I mean, I personally try to be as democratic as possible but I also know there are times where you know, you can't take every single decision to the staff, there are times where as a manager you need to make a decision and that's it. You make the decision, you consider all the factors and you look at what's best for the institution and you make the decision, but one needs to be definitely more democratic. I think more of a situational leader, I think, you know. You look at what the situation at hand [is] and you go, you make progress from there, but you cannot be an autocrat, sit in your office and demand that this is to be done and that is to be done (Interview, School Principal 9).

This idea of situational or contingency leadership was echoed by another principal, albeit from a slightly different angle:

> …now we have more of this consultative management that's happening all the time, we are not autocratic, we are moving towards a democratic leading that we do. But at the same time I do believe that sometimes, autocratic decisions have to be taken. I feel a good leader would be one who is autocratic when he needs to be and very democratic most of the time (Interview, School Principal 12).

Although I would argue that there are matters that require a leader to provide leadership in terms of the best course of action or decision that needs to be taken, I would not posit that a good leader is someone who acts autocratically at times. The fact that School Principal 12 argued that a leader may need to be autocratic at times and be democratic most of the time, raises serious questions for me. One question I would pose, for example is: what if that leader was autocratic in relation to critical decisions that affect the majority of the stakeholders in and outside the school and democratic mostly in relation to less important matters or decisions?

The complexities of the role of the principal under the new conditions and the need for the involvement of all stakeholders — including the community — was not lost to this cadre of progressive and transformative principals, as illustrated by the observations of one of the principals:

> The principal's role is now very, very complex. He has to have a kind of relationship—he is found at the centre where you've got members of the governing body, the parent component, you've got the teacher component, you got his staff, you've got the pupils, you've got now the community, you've got the management of education outside of your school. Now you've got to juggle [all these aspects] (Interview, School Principal 5).

It is interesting to note that within this cadre of what I prefer to call "progressive and transformative" school principals, there were principals who engaged in creative and innovative ways of dealing with the challenges of the communities surrounding their schools. For instance, in explaining how the role of the principal has changed, one principal indicated that:

> Perhaps another thing that has changed about the principal is that they have learnt about how important the community is – to involve the community in the school… (Interview, School Principal 13).

This principal then went on to explain how he had in fact worked with the community to deal with their (community's) challenges:

> In this school what I've done—as you can see this portion of the vegetable garden, I've entered into a partnership with the community health workers so as to assist those people in the community who are suffering from TB, HIV/AIDS. These people need to eat fresh foods and vegetables, but they don't have the money to go buy spinach or cabbage. So, what I did was to say the community health workers can plough vegetables in the school and then use these vegetables to feed those people who are needy. In that way, the school is making a contribution to the community. At the same time the learners get something—eating fresh food—at the same time they [the mothers who plough the vegetables] are teaching the learners the importance of using the soil effectively for business. (Interview, School Principal 13).

It is worth noting that out of the thirteen school principals that I call progressive and transformative principals, ten were actively involved in the communities where their schools were located, as part of the community's organisational structures.

There were other school principals in this study who indicated that they had recognised the need to change:

> …you need to adapt and change the—your policies and procedures can never be static, they must change (Interview, School Principal 18).

Other principals in this study indicated that they had had to change their mindsets and their general attitude in managing schools during these changed and changing times. As one principal indicated:

> I can say that it's my attitude because I have this open mind now that I'm not the one running the school, really, I am not the one, we are running the school. The parents are running the school, the teachers are running the school, the children are running the school. That's my attitude, and with that I find that I have no problem at all. I bring them on board for everything (Interview, School Principal 17).

The fact that some principals espoused the notion of distributed leadership in their approaches to school leadership and management, is indeed interesting, particularly given the fact that other principals found the whole notion of shared leadership/shared decision making to be quite a challenging practice — as discussed earlier in this section.

5.4 Vexing challenges with which school principals have to contend under the changed conditions prevailing in schools

The question of the kind of vexing challenges with which the principals have to contend in schools under the new prevailing conditions is an attempt to get to the heart of the kind of challenges that principals in KZN have to deal with given the new dispensation. This

question gets closer to the over-arching research question of this study, namely, what are the links between formal education management development programmes and the needs of school principals? In this section of the chapter, the focus is on four recurring themes that school principals in this study highlighted, namely, the challenges of limited resources, school governing bodies (SGBs), policy implementation (particularly Outcomes Based Education) and policy overload.

5.4.1 The challenges of dealing with limited resources

During the interviews with school principals dealing with the kind of vexing challenges with which they have to deal, one of the most recurring themes was the problem of limited resources, particularly financial resources. Without fail, the principals in this study mentioned resource limitations as their major challenge. Most of the principals in the study (27 out of 31) related the problem of resources to the issue of school fees — the inability of a majority of learners, particularly those who come from poor backgrounds, to pay. This is not unexpected in a country like South Africa where the majority of communities are poverty stricken. As one principal put it:

> The socio-economic climate is very depressing so we have a problem with the collection of school fees and that impacts on the resourcing of the school… We have fifty percent of our children who come from townships and squatter camps [informal settlements] as well and it's not easy to demand the fees from them (Interview, School Principal 9).

This was echoed by another school principal who sounded very desperate regarding the issue of financial limitations. As she put it:

> Right now we are going through a real financial problem at our school especially in this school because half the children don't pay their fees, okay, and the sum of money we are getting from the [provincial] Department [of Education] is very little and that doesn't even just cover our lights and water for three or four months…. Financially we

are going through a tough, tough period (Interview, School Principal 23).

In one case, the school principal indicated just how dire the conditions were when she indicated that:

> …the finance is a major, major problem at our schools because ninety percent of [the learners] cannot afford it [school fees] – how do we manage the school? (Interview, School Principal 12).

She further indicated that:

> …at least fifty percent of children that attend the school, parents are unemployed…. parent who come to my office and talk about school fees will tell you, 'we're not working so what can we do?' (Interview, School Principal 12).

Indeed, there were a number of school principals who related the problem of limited resources to the social conditions in the communities served by the schools:

> A very large number of my learners come from backgrounds that are extremely poor… very low educational background, there are a lot of broken families, a lot of single-parent families, very low income earners…. and there is a very high level of unemployment in this community, extremely high (Interview, School Principal 15).

> …in this school, I will tell you, maybe half the children come from divorced homes, [homes with] single parents, unemployment, and that is also causing our discipline problems, you know (Interview, School Principal 10).

> I just want to give you some statistics, this is the township of _____ [area] outside Durban, and the community is a poorer one with the following inherent problems, low socio-economic area with learners from informal settlement, high levels of unemployment— approximately seventy percent, single-parent families approximately twenty five percent, of those who earn income the majority earn below R1 500 per month, many have unpaid electricity, water and rate bills leading to disconnections and evictions. The general level of education is low in the community thereby making it difficult for parents to support learners in the school activities (Interview, School Principal 28).

As is evident from the latter two responses, some principals attributed problems in the communities to other problems in their schools, beyond resource shortages. They alluded to the problems of discipline and the problem of lack of support of the learners by the parents. One principal in this study went as far as arguing that the educational levels of the parents were also a major contributory factor. This principal contrasted the conditions in his school with what he considered to be the conditions in former affluent or former model C schools:

> Parents' level of education is also very low, so from a support point of view they cannot help us or support us in working with their children, unlike in the _____ and _____ [affluent areas in KZN] where the parents are lawyers and doctors and accountants, it's the other way around here (Interview, School Principal 22).

Although a majority of the school principals that I interviewed cited the issue of non-payment of school fees as one of their major problems, some principals (13 out of 31) related the problem to the difficulties associated with policy dictates. This is captured in the comments of one of these principals who argued that:

> One of the major challenges that one faces is the issue of school fees. As I indicated earlier, the situation is such that most people are unemployed and they have to pay the school fees. You find that the Act, the South African Schools Act says that no learner can be prevented from attending school on the basis of their inability to pay the school fees. But then the parents who pay the school fees put pressure [on the school] that those learners who do not pay need to be expelled because they [the parents who are paying] will also refuse to pay. We have to balance how we are going to deal with those who are paying and those who are not paying, at the same time there is an Act which, you know, as a principal prevents you from expelling the learners. So, that is a problem. It is one of the problems that one is facing and creates a dilemma about how to solve it (Interview, School Principal 13).

Another principal also used the issue of non-payment school fees to illustrate what I consider to be a disjuncture between the policy and the expected practice.

> You know, I am very disappointed with the Department [of Education], I think their people up there have forgotten what it is [like] to be down here… the fact that this child has no food at home

and he must attend school, the fact that you [are] saying to me that 'look don't charge this child school fees and you've got to give education and at the end of it you want me to pay my lights and water, and you give me R40 000 for the year and my lights and water are R60 000. How am I supposed to—so I think the Department, I see them as policy makers, they're just making policy, um, I don't think they understand the impact of their policies lower down (Interview, School Principal 31).

According to this principal, the policy coming from the top (national Department of Education) was devoid of reality as experienced by school principals in schools. She implied that the departmental officials had lost sight of how the conditions in the schools are because of having lost touch with the realities on the ground.

5.4.2 The challenges of dealing with school governing bodies

Another critical area which principals mentioned as posing a major challenge for them working under the post-1994 conditions was their dealings with the School Governing Bodies (SGBs) — a post-1994 phenomenon. Almost all the principals that I interviewed (25 out of 31) mentioned the SGBs as being one of the challenges that they were faced with.

The introduction of SGBs into the South African schools scene — as mandated by legislation, the South African Schools Act (SASA) (Act 84 of 1996) — seems to have been a major cause of disruption in a number of schools in KZN and elsewhere in the country. Schools which had operated mainly either with both management and governance of the school vested in the office of the principal, or those which had operated within the ambit of the undemocratic structures such as School Committees, all of a sudden found themselves having to deal with and recognise democratic structures such as the SGBs. It was, therefore, not unexpected that major problems would result from the introduction of SGBs in schools.

For the most part, the principals complained about the fact that the SGBs were interfering with the work of the school principal and eroding their (principals) power and authority. The succinct comments of one of the school principals echo the views of the majority of school principals in this study:

> Governing bodies always want to erode the authority of the principal and that leads to problems (Interview, School Principal 1).

While making it clear that he had experienced problems with the first cohort of SGB members who were inaugurated in 1996, another principal explained the whole problem of interference in relation to SGBs' veto powers:

> Look, already this is the second set of governing body members that are serving the school. Now, the first one we had a serious problem with them in the sense that they were interfering a lot. Interfering in the sense that if you want[ed] to push a certain budget for the school, because these people want to be good with the community, they go and overturn you at your decision at a meeting. For instance, you want a school fund of R300 00, they will go and tell parents, 'No, we can run this school for R200 00 school fund from each pupil' (Interview, School Principal 15).[44]

While some principals expressed concerns regarding the perception that SGBs were eroding their (principals) power and authority, others were concerned about the powers or the assumed powers of the SGBs. School principals' sentiments in this regard are encapsulated in the comments of one principal who argued that:

> One of my biggest problems with the governing body at the moment would be the powers that they—not all of them [but] some of them—the powers that they seem to be giving themselves, which they don't have, especially when it comes to, for example, the employment or the recommendation of employment of teachers… (Interview, School Principal 27).

---

[44] According to this principal, eventually "matters came to a head" and a vote of no confidence was passed forcing the SGB to step down.

Indeed, there had been a number of cases reported in the media in KZN where there were problems regarding the employment of teachers, particularly in relation to the role of SGBs. In fact, one of the principals in this study also alluded to some of the problems that were experienced in the employment of teachers in his school, albeit with a different set of dynamics:

> …because there was nobody that was promoted from within the staff, the staff has moved a vote of no confidence in the Governing Body. So, the staff is saying [that] they don't want to work with the Governing Body. So, there is some kind of tension between staff and the Governing Body (Interview, School Principal 15).

Some school principals, as illustrated by the principal cited below, saw the interference as related to the confusion that the SGBs were having in relation to their roles:

> Look, we've had our fair share in terms of the school governance where the parents did not know the parameters by which they should work. They took—it was a misunderstanding of the South African Schools Act. You found that there were interferences in terms of the running of the school, the differences between the professional running of the school and the governance of the school (Interview, School Principal 19).

In fact, a number of the principals that I interviewed (22 out of 31) saw the problem as resulting from a lack of role clarification. As one principal put it:

> When we started with the governing body, the first lot, they didn't know their boundaries, you know, the professional side and the governance side (Interview, School Principal 17).

Another principal saw the problem of role confusion as necessitating the national Department of Education to provide professional development opportunities not only for the school governors, but also for the school managers and leaders:

> We need as managers to be further empowered and supported by the Department [of Education] officials that this is where the school governing bodies stop and this is where a Principal takes off at school.

> The professional cannot be mixed up with school governance. And you find all these problems in the [news]papers and it's largely due to people not knowing their roles (Interview, School Principal 2).

This was quite an interesting departure from the usual refrain which focuses exclusively on the SGB members as the ones who are not adequately trained and thus requiring training.

The view of a lack of clarity with regards to management (what some principals referred to as the professional role) and governance roles was also echoed by another principal who argued that the problem with school governance in most schools was that:

> …lots of parents are under the impression they are now going to control the schools. We don't have that problem here but in _____ [name of the area], I'm talking generally, schools are having lots of problems because of misunderstanding in terms of professional and non-professional aspects.… Professional and non-professional [areas] is where the governing body members actually encroach into the professional sphere of the school… (Interview, School Principal 11).

I must say that I found the use of the language of 'interference' or 'encroachment' by school principals, quite intriguing. The use of these concepts presented a sense of principals feeling some kind of invasion by the SGBs on their territories[45]. Although there seem to be instances where school principals' concerns seem legitimate pertaining to 'interference', for the most part, I got a sense that school principals felt that SGBs were encroaching on areas which in the past were the sole preserve of school principals.

It should be mentioned that there were some school principals whose conception of the role of SGB was quite limited and could in fact be considered problematic. These principals struggled with seeing SGBs as important players in the decision making structures of the school. In fact, they saw SGBs as playing mainly a supportive role without much in terms of

---

[45] Earlier in this Chapter I cited school principals who felt that parents were taking over their 'turf.'

influencing critical decisions in the school. An example of these types of principals is one principal who saw SGBs more as fund-raising agencies:

> I would say we never had a problem with the working relationship with the governing body, but the Department [of Education] has put them there mainly like for fund raising and what have you (Interview, School Principal 26).

Another example is of a school principal who acknowledged that some principals see SGBs mainly as responsible for keeping teachers on their toes. As he indicated,

> As principals we do play a role in a situation whereby we use [SGBs] as monsters to frighten teachers, so that teachers do their work. They [SGBs] end up seeing their role mainly in terms of keeping teachers in check (Interview, School Principal 24).

There seemed to be a general consensus amongst school principals in this study that the major contributory factor to most of their problems with the SGBs was, to a large extent, the lack of skills and the lack of adequate training on the part of the school governors. I would argue that in as much as some principals seemed to welcome and accept the SGBs as a necessary and important part of school governance, most of these principals expressed their frustrations with the SGBs resulting from what they perceived to be a problem of lack of adequate training and proper understanding of their roles. Principals used the fact that the parent component of the SGB — which, by law has to be the majority in the governing body — seemed to be struggling with fulfilling their roles, as evidence for their claims. As one principal argued:

> …the Department [of Education] has shifted its responsibility more towards the parents and my parents are struggling with that in terms of not having skills to go about doing [their job]. And in governance, governance involves the formation of policy, handling of funds and everything, so they are really struggling with that mainly because they have not been properly trained (Interview, School Principal 8).

And another principal posited that:

> Governing bodies are creating a lot of problems as a result of lack of knowledge and lack of training, they normally interfere in areas where they shouldn't (Interview, School Principal 1).

While acknowledging that inadequate training was a major contributory factor in so far as the problems with SGBs were concerned, other principals saw the problem as the problem of lack of formal education or illiteracy on the part of some SGB members:

> Another problem—I'm not sure how this one could be attended to—is the issue of education. If you look at the South African Schools Act, it does not say a particular parent has got to have this level of education for him [or her] to be eligible for membership in the governing body. So, you find that we've got a number of people who are in the governing body but if you look at these laws they are written in English even though they tried to translate them into IsiZulu or into IsiXhosa, people still are not able to read them because they are illiterate. So, in the end you find that you've got quite a number of people in the governing body who are not knowledgeable about the basics of what the governing body is supposed to do (Interview, School Principal 14).

This principal used an example of the role of the SGBs in teacher appointments to illustrate how SGBs' lack of knowledge of how the work of the SGB should be conducted — precipitated by the lack of adequate training — was contributing to the SGBs not fulfilling their mandate:

> Let me use an example to illustrate my point. If you are going to employ someone, you usually say to that person 'In your application you must also include two or three referees.' I still have to see one governing body phoning those referees in advance to get more information about the candidate. I've never seen a single governing body doing that. So, that section in the application form where one is supposed to write down two or three referees is a waste of time because governing bodies are not using that. My understanding of how the interview should be conducted is not what is going on there (Interview, School Principal 14).

Within the group of school principals who highlighted the issue of a lack of formal education as constituting a major problem, one principal went on to lament the fact that most of the people who become SGB members in her school are individuals without tertiary level qualifications. This principal implied in her comments that these individuals without tertiary level qualifications may not contribute much to the school's development:

> The governing body, maybe in more affluent area, they will do more for the school – I'm not saying that mine doesn't do a lot, I am really indebted to what they do for us in their own way. But the thing is that they themselves haven't had experiences, they haven't got tertiary education. There are a few who have higher education but they don't want to get involved…. So, when we ask for membership for elections, we are getting housewives who have left school in like, say Grade 10, and they've had no experience—we have to do a lot of work with them—lots and lots of workshops with them. Doing these, eh, what you call, new policies with them, duties and responsibilities, lots and lots… (Interview, School Principal 17).

The problem of school governors' illiteracy was also borne out by another school principal who indicated that in her school they had gone beyond the workshops organised by the provincial Department of Education and organised school-based workshops in order to deal particularly with the problem of language:

> …our school has organised such workshops because usually, you'll find [that] they do have these workshops but they do not feel comfortable going to those workshops because of the medium of instruction [English] that is being used. So what we did as a school, we're workshopping them ourselves (Interview, School Principal 8).

Related to the problem of a lack of formal education, was another problem raised by school principals in this study, namely, the lack of experiences in the education field. One principal saw this problem as transcending the lack of formal education or the problem of illiteracy. She intimated that the problem with SGBs was made worse by the lack of experiences in education among the school governors:

> I would lay the blame with the Department of Education. They were, you know, you cannot have a workshop once a year and say 'you are now empowered to be a governing body member.' Okay they—I'm not here talking about education, I'm talking about experience you can have whatever degree in whatever sphere of life, but I'm saying if you don't have experience in education you're a novice, you know what I'm saying. So, there should have been more support programmes for them [SGBs] (Interview, School Principal 23).

Another principal supported the view that experiences within (and beyond) the education field were a critical element in ensuring effective and efficient school governors. This principal also linked the issue of the experiences to the importance of the general composition of the SGB:

> SGBs didn't receive enough training but the people I've got have been in education and business so they were able to make sound judgments. But again, it all depends on the composition of the—the make-up of the people that you've got with you [on the SGB] (Interview, School Principal 6).

Another principal, in line with the argument about the importance of the experiences of the people who are in the governing body, attributed her success with the SGB to the chairperson of the body:

> Look, we are fortunate we do have a very good School Governing Body. In fact we have a very dynamic chairperson, he's in the education system, he's a, um, HOD at the _____ [name of school]. So he's *au fait* with education. So we both work together, even I talk to him he talks my language, he knows exactly what is happening. (Interview, School Principal 10).

It would seem that a good working relationship between the school principal and the chairperson of the SGB sets a general tone for a positive working relationship between the SGB and the school principal. Other principals in this study also pointed to positive relationships that they enjoyed with the SGB chairpersons. As one of the principals put it:

> Fortunately we've got a very understanding SGB and wherever there's a problem we call the chairman, the chairman comes to the school even if the problems—like, today he came because last week I discovered that

we have children who are orphans, who are living by themselves… We have a very cooperative SGB (Interview, School Principal 21).

There were some principals in this study who brought about an interesting element to the discourse regarding the challenges of dealing with SGBs. These principals explained the problems with SGBs from the point of view that some people had joined these bodies for ulterior motives. The views of School Principal 25 — who posited that some school governors had joined the SGB for self-serving reasons—echo the sentiments of school principals in this regard:

> …my own view is that in some areas, this thing of [School] Governing Bodies has been hijacked by people who have their own interests. Some of these people are just looking for money – you find that at times there is a power struggle between the principal and the governing body because some governing bodies end up wanting to have a share in school funds. And when the principal tries to intervene, it result[s] in problems. Then with regards to interviews [for teacher appointments], there are allegations — I will say these are allegations because no one has been convicted as yet — that some SGBs have a tendency *yokugwazisa ukuze umuntu athole i-post* [to require bribes in order for one to get a teaching post] (Interview, School Principal 25).

Indeed, the issue of corruption concerning teacher appointment interviews, is an open secret, although there has been a lack of evidence to support the claims due to people not coming forward to report incidents of such corruption.

It should be pointed out that not all the principals who spoke about their relationships with SGBs painted a negative picture — as already illustrated by the responses of School Principal 10 and School Principals 21 above, who attributed their positive experiences to the kind of SGB chairpersons they had. In fact, there were a few principals (6 out of 31) who indicated that they had enjoyed a pleasant relationship with their SGBs. As one principal indicated:

I can say that so far with the governing body our relationship is very good and we seem to get along in a good way and the people we are working with are people who show commitment, they have commitment (Interview, School Principal 7).

During the interview with this principal, I got a sense that he seemed to attribute the positive working relationship that the school or the management of the school was having with the SGB, to the fact that everyone has a good understanding of the roles that their positions require them to play, the extent of their power, and that there's mutual respect. As he put it:

The governing body knows its power. The powers of the governing body start from there and end here. And we as teachers who have been trained that we must respect the governing body members but at the same time they must also respect us. So far everything is smooth in our relationship (Interview, School Principal 7).

He further attributed this positive relationship to the fact that:

…every time when there is a meeting, there's that good interaction between teachers and parents; there is nothing that is hidden, everything is [in the] open. So, if the parents are here they ask questions, and they're being answered satisfactorily (Interview, School Principal 7).

While acknowledging that things were not always smooth sailing, another principal also painted quite a positive picture of his relationship with the SGB:

…at our school my governing body and I we get along as friends, we've developed this camaraderie, this team spirit where we work together. It took a little bit of moulding to get that right, initially it wasn't the way it is now but we pointed it out to them that we are no longer in competition with you, we are now working together for the child (Interview, School Principal 16).

Other principals in this study attributed their positive relationships with the SGB to other factors, such as the principal who argued that the reason that he was not experiencing problems was because of a variety of reasons:

In this school there are no problems that one is encountering because the parent component of the SGB is made up of people who are willing to learn, what can I say, eh, mainly they are dependent on me to teach them about what their responsibilities are, about the Schools Act [the South African Schools Act of 1996]. Everything we do, there is transparency, we do not have problems. Most of them [parent component of the SGB] are people with whom I serve on community structures (Interview, School Principal 13).

As to what extent the cordial relationship with the SGB is as a result of the unequal power due to the 'dependency' of the parent component of the SGB on the school principal, begs the question. However, to be fair to this principal other factors could equally be playing a crucial role in ensuring that a good relationship existed in this school—such as working together in the community, as indicated by the principal.

5.4.3 The challenges of policy implementation

Policy implementation was one area that the school principals mentioned as being one of their biggest challenges. Specifically, outcomes based education (OBE) was one of the most common challenges that a majority of principals in this study (28 out of 31) mentioned. The general feeling that school principals had regarding this curriculum reform, OBE, is encapsulated in the comments of one of the principals who indicated that:

The implementing of the OBE is a tremendous task because, you know, we all came from what you call the old school of thought and to implement OBE was at that time a very trying thing because it had to make us begin to move from the conventional curriculum based education now to the outcomes based education. And where the difficulties were further noted is that educators had to teach the content-based education at the higher levels and then come to the lower grades for outcomes based education, at the one end the old school and then the new school, so this shift was problematic structurally (Interview, School Principal 3).

Not all the principals (or even teachers) had bought into this curriculum change, as illustrated by the views of the principal below:

> I find that it [OBE] hasn't convinced the educator and myself in particular as a manager that it's here to stay. For example, they didn't have a solution to the problem of Grade 9s, they didn't have a solution for Grades 10, 11 and 12, they had to resort, I think its Standard 8s or 9s, one grade that has to go back to the old system of education... How do you have old and new [systems together] you should have all new completely or nothing. They don't know themselves what the Matric [Grade 12] paper will look like in five years time. So everything is in an uncontrolled state of flux (Interview, School Principal 2).

Clearly, this principal — as was the case with a number of other principal in this study — was extremely frustrated by what he saw as a confusing state of affairs. The fact that he, as a school manager did not believe in the change would make it extremely difficult for his followers in the school — the teachers — to believe or buy into the change. As has been shown by numerous studies looking into the implementation of policy changes (for instance, latest studies of curriculum, evaluation and others changes such as Lucen, 2003; Hariparsad, 2004; Stoffels, 2004, to name but a few), most people (teachers) deal with frustration with change by reverting to what they know best — the traditional way of doing things. One principal in the present study confirmed the general feeling that teachers were not implementing the curriculum changes as required, despite numerous professional development opportunities that they have been exposed to:

> No matter what workshop you go to, how much of it, other training that you receive, when you enter the classroom you tend to fall into the same mould like you did things in the past... whether OBE is being done the way it's supposed to be done, I'm not sure (Interview, School Principal 15).

It would seem that one of the major reasons why some school principals were frustrated by this curriculum change (OBE) was because the introduction of OBE disempowered and de-skilled them. The general feeling with the school principals was that the challenge with

OBE lay in the fact that everyone — teachers, parents and school managers — lacked the necessary knowledge. The views of School Principal 11 below seem to capture the essence of what school principals in this study expressed:

> OBE is a challenge, lots of challenge… there's a lack of understanding on the part of the parents, also educators, okay, and management (Interview, School Principal 11).

Indeed, a number of principals (24 out of 31) emphasised the need for training, as illustrated by the views of the principal below:

> …with the delivery of OBE, the biggest challenge is, um, the training of educators. We felt that there ought to be more training than one day, once-off kind of thing… (Interview, School Principal 6).

In the case of School Principal 6's school, they responded to the need for training by utilising the resources at their disposal:

> …we utilised our district facilitator—one of the district facilitator is on our staff, so we utilised his expertise to give us additional training… (Interview, School Principal 6).

Other principals in this study indicated that they had put measures in place to assist parents to understand OBE by offering training workshops. As one of the principals indicated:

> Every year, twice a year, we have workshops for the parents… At the beginning of the year we had a workshop, we asked the parents to come in and we gave them, um, in other words we teach them about what OBE is all about so they will know what to expect from their child, so they can supervise their assignments (Interview, School Principal 10).

During the one-on-one interviews with school principals it was interesting to note that there were some principals who still saw their roles as helpless implementers of educational policies, as illustrated by the perceptions of School Principal 2 below:

> I'm very amiable to listen to you, however if you have instructions or departmental manuals like this [raising a provincial departmental manual to the air], these are instructions from the department to follow,

there's not much I can do other than follow. I'm an implementer of the policy but not a questioner (Interview, School Principal 2).

However, there were other principals who indicated that they were active players in the interpretation of the policy implementation process. These principals explained how they had used policies in such a manner that they fitted the context in which they were working. For instance, one principal described how they, in his school, had dealt with the challenge of OBE. He explained how they were able to merge OBE with the traditional curriculum in ways that were beneficial to the learners in the school:

> We at management level brain-stormed how we were going to deliberate and work amongst ourselves and work at school level to ensure that, um, the OBE meets the requirement of DAS [Developmental Appraisal System], DAS initiatives, but at the same time we felt that it had the shortcomings and we married OBE with our traditional curriculum kind of thing. With hindsight that was a good thing because our Grade 10s now are doing the old style of subjects and we were able, for example, we took the OBE of EMS, Economic and Management Sciences, and broke it up into Accounting and Business Economics and delivered that as a curriculum as part of OBE in Grade 8 and 9. Quite a few schools didn't do the Accounting component, now they say that in Grade 10 how are they going to do Accounting? (Interview, School Principal 6).

This innovative way of fusing the old with the new is in contrast with how other principals were dealing with this particular change — OBE — as illustrated by the views of School Principal 2 (lack of a buy-in) and School Principal 15 (falling back to old ways) above.

5.4.4 The challenges of policy overload

Another challenge that the school principals in this study alluded to, was the issue of policy overload, or as some principals put it, "policy influx"[46] or "innovation overload." In other words, the feeling that schools were bombarded by a barrage of policies or innovations that they were required to implement. As some principals put it:

> …what is happening is [that] there is too much information coming down to the teacher from the Department [of Education], too much information coming down to the principal… (Interview, School Principal 30).

> Our feeling is that nationally [national Department of Education] they're coming up with too many policies, too quickly and I think that's going to be somewhere along the lines of policy overload that I spoke about (Interview, School Principal 6).

School Principal 6 went on to indicate the frustrations that schools were having whereby,

> … before we settle down with one initiative, one policy, that's put on the back burner, [then] something new comes up (Interview, School Principal 6).

Generally, school principals seemed to be frustrated with the pace of change, as illustrated by the perceptions of School Principal 2:

> I feel that the changes have taken place sporadically at such a rapid pace that what was true for today doesn't hold for tomorrow, I'm very serious… everything is in… an uncontrolled state of flux (Interview, School Principal 2).

Another principal in this study also expressed his concerns with regards to keeping up with the policies coming from the national Department of Education:

> One needs to be forever above this growing heap of legislation. Besides SASA—South African Schools Act, we got Employers Act—Basic Conditions of Employment Act, Skills Development Act, you know, all these things. We need to know everything about that because if we don't [and] something goes wrong here, paw, we catching it (Interview, School Principal 16).

---

[46] Interesting enough, this feeling of policy overload was also shared by some of the EMDP providers.

There were some school principals who discussed the challenge of policy overload in relation to the further challenges that they had to deal with, posed by Teachers Unions:

> The situation is challenging in terms of the unions. The [Teachers] Unions have brought a lot of challenges to the principal, especially when it comes to the policies of the Department [of Education]. In the end, the principal ends up between a rock and the hard place because the Department [of Education] expects him to implement a certain policy and the unions are questioning and challenging him about that policy (Interview, School Principal 27).

> The policies of the Department [of Education] in most cases are not taken kindly by the [Teachers] Unions. Here's the policy of the Department and you're asked to come and implement it and the minute you cascade it to the teachers you are challenged by the Unions, 'that has not been agreed upon.' That's a serious frustration that we are encountering or I'm encountering as the head of this school when I'm being asked by the employer to come and cascade this, which is a resolution of the employer, and I'm met with opposition (Interview, School Principal 19).

School Principal 19 further provided an example to illustrate his point:

> If I may take one example, Whole School Evaluation: we have repeatedly been pushed by the Department [of Education] to come and implement Whole School Evaluation and the teachers have said 'No' to Whole School Evaluation. And you can imagine now you look like it's your thing, you're coming to say this and you feel undermined when the teachers say 'No, we're not going to implement that' (Interview, School Principal 19).

Although a number of school principals expressed their frustrations with having to deal with the flood of policies while at the same time being challenged by teachers and the unions, there were some school principals who pointed out that they used different strategies to ensure teacher buy-in and therefore eliminated half the problems pertaining to policy implementation. To take an example of one of the principals in this group, School Principal 9 explained how she deals with departmental policies at her school within the broader context of change management. She began by acknowledging the fact that these policies have a major impact on the educators on the ground, and that her role as school

principal is made difficult by the fact that she has to ensure a "buy-in" from the educators and engage the educators in an effort to help them understand and implement the policies as effectively as possible:

> …there's so many, there's such a great number of policies that we are implementing and it seems that a lot of it impacts very much on the level ones [post-level one educators], so it's not easy to just go to them [educators] and say this is DAS [Developmental Appraisal System] or this is Whole School Evaluation and we're putting it into practice. We've had to engage [educators] into accepting and implementing the policies as required by the Department [of Education] (Interview, School Principal 9).

This principal went on to explain how she "sells" the policies to her staff:

> …when there's change I always try to indicate to them that there are the positives, there might be the negatives, but there are the positives, it's not the easiest job to do to convince people to engage in change but it's important because without change, I mean, its gonna be static and education is dynamic (Interview, School Principal 9).

Another school principal also explained how they have been able to ensure teacher buy-in in his school due to the manner in which they managed change.

> It necessitates some groundwork before you can get the policy implemented, for example, if you believe in the vision of the Department's policy, you sell that vision firstly to the SMT [School Management Team], the senior management of the school, then if we agree with that vision then we take it down to the teachers, we debate around it and ensure [that] they agree with it, then we implement the policy (Interview, School Principal 31).

Clearly these school principals exhibit signs of having a clear understanding of change management and how to effectively deal and assist those they work with in accepting and dealing with change. It is worth mentioning that both School Principal 9 and School Principal 31 belong to a group of principals that I earlier referred to as "progressive and transformative" school principals.

179

A number of school principals in this study (17 out of 31) brought a different and interesting dimension to the issue of policy overload, namely, the view that school principals were voiceless when it comes to policy formation. The comments of School Principal 25 capture the sentiments of the school principals in this group. Although he initially spoke about principals' voiceless-ness from a labour relations point of view, School Principal 25 brought the issue closer to the practicalities of policy implementation:

> We don't have a voice, principals don't have a voice anywhere, we're not represented. We don't have a seat on the ELRC [Education Labour Relations Council] because we don't have the numbers in the [Bargaining] Chamber, and we feel that we need to be consulted because any policy that comes down either from national or provincial [Departments], it's gonna be implemented by us, and we can immediately see the, the practicality of it and how it's going to be implemented…. this is where we feel a bit marginalised and we're trying to be heard (Interview, School Principal 25).

Another principal also echoed the views of School Principal 25 when he simply argued that:

> Let me put it this way, I believe that if you are going to implement change you at least should be involved in the development of that change, in the development of the policies. As principals we are not consulted, yet we are expected to implement the changes (Interview, School Principal 29).

I would argue that the importance of having principals represented on policy formulation structures goes beyond the guidance that they can offer about the practicalities in the implementation process. In fact, if the principals are not convinced about the importance and the need of a particular policy, chances are that they will not be supportive of the measures aimed at that particular policy's successful implementation.

5.4.5 The post-1994 conditions and the challenges of being a female principal: Some anecdotes

Although in designing this study special care was taken to control for gender differences, gender was not one of the variables that I specifically planned to focus on when the study was conceptualised. However, there were some incidents that the female school principals shared during the interviews, which were gender specific, and illustrated the challenges of being a female principal. It is for that reason that I therefore include a section that briefly explores these sentiments. In this brief section I share 'stories' of three of the ten female school principals in this study, who touched upon gender issues during interviews.

One of the challenges that female school principals shared during interviews was the issue of not being taken seriously by the parent community:

> Another challenge that I found was the gender thing—as a female. Like Indian parents didn't take me seriously, you know, because they come from that patriarchal society. I wasn't taken seriously (Interview, School Principal 10).

To further illustrate this challenge, another school principal recounted a poignant incident that had happened to her:

> I had one incident where there was an accident, a child was hurt. The police came, the ambulance came—he was knocked [down] by a car on the road. The police came and I was sitting on the pavement with this child, I was actually holding him in my lap. The first policeman came, he got out the car and said, 'Where's the principal, does your principal'—he's looking at me—'does your principal know that there's been an accident here?' I said 'Yes the principal knows and the principal is waiting for you to come', you know. And when they removed the child he asked, 'Who's the principal?' and there was a mother standing there and she said, 'This is the principal' (Interview, School Principal 17).

Another principal alluded to the fact that she experienced problems with the SGB of her school due to the fact that she was considered to be too outspoken — something, according to her, that was not expected from a female:

> I consider myself to be very outspoken and I always put my school first and if I felt that something wasn't working for the school I would say it at any time. Personally I think that was not appreciated by the governing body, they probably thought I was a problem [and] I was resisting what everybody else was saying, *etcetera*. And also I think generally when a female sort of opposes, it's not taken too kindly, I could be wrong but I just—initially I felt that, you know, people considered me to be just too outspoken especially being a female (Interview, School Principal 9).

This principal indicated that later on when the SGB understood that she in fact had a concern for the welfare of the school and the learners, their relationship improved and they started to work cooperatively:

> …over the years they [the SGB] have grown and I think also with that growth and experience in education they've learnt as well that what I was saying was for the betterment of the school…. Currently we have a very good relationship. I think they know me, and I know them a little bit better and we have now a common goal, we are all working to the betterment of our school and probably that is why we get on very well (Interview, School Principal 9).

I should, however, mention that interestingly enough, one young African female principal (between the ages of 30 and 35) that I interviewed indicated that she did not experience any major challenges with regards to working with her staff, who are mostly African males. She cited the following as a possible reason for her success:

> Maybe it's the way, I, maybe it's the way that I handle them. I know Black men want to feel man-ish, you know, so I've never taken that away from them. I respect them as men but when it comes to work, work comes first (Interview, School Principal 8).

I found this insightful as far as gender challenges are concerned. To me, it points to the fact that in order for a woman leader to succeed while in charge of males, she has to know her

place/their (men) place and respect them because of being men, and in that way she would be able to get them to fulfil the organisational goals. Although it seems to be working well for School Principal 8, this situation is in my view problematic as it perpetuates patriarchal norms.

In conclusion, what these few citations from the female principals seem to indicate is that beyond all the challenges that have inundated school principals post-1994 in South Africa, female principals have had to also contend with the challenges of being female school heads.

5.5   The value of EMDPs in relation to principalship roles/Aspects of EMDPs that equipped principals to deal with post-1994 challenges

The broad question with which this study was concerned was the links between formal education management development programmes and the needs of school principals. Coupled with this concern, was the issue of the perceptions of principals in terms of the benefits of formal EMDPs in relation to their practices in schools or the fulfilment of their roles as school principals. During one-on-one interviews, I asked school principals what they had learnt in their EMDPs that had equipped them to deal with the post-1994 challenges. I further asked whether were there any particular or specific aspects of their professional development that they felt had equipped them to deal with the post-1994 challenges effectively.

In this section of the chapter I focus on the responses of the school principals regarding their perceptions of whether the EMDPs had/had not equipped them for the new conditions found in schools following the changes that took place in South Africa in 1994.

In other words, I begin to look into the issue of the relevance of EMDPs *vis-à-vis* school principals' practices under the post-apartheid conditions in schools.

There were a number of principals in the sample of this study who felt that EMDPs had assisted them in terms of their leadership and management of schools (22 out of 31). These principals felt that these education management development programmes had been invaluable in a variety of aspects of their practice. At the very basic level, school principals appreciated the skills they had acquired from the EMDPs, as illustrated by the views of the principals below:

> Having done management I'd say I think I'm convinced that I chose the right choice when I registered for the BEd [Honours] and I registered for BEd in [Education] Management that, you know, conflict resolution skills that I'm able to handle such situations, and I'm able to reflect on what I've learnt in my [leadership and management training] (Interview with School Principal 4).

> The other thing that comes to mind is that of interpersonal skills, how you relate to your colleagues, how you relate to other people. That's also helping me a lot (Interview with School Principal 25).

School principals also highlighted the fact that this type of professional development had assisted them in terms of acquiring problem solving, conflict and time management skills. As one principal indicated in regard to conflict:

> My training taught me that the important thing is how to manage conflict—conflict will always be there whenever there are people. What is important is its management. So, that does help me and we do manage conflict; and also the fact that in conflict you learn how to understand peoples' characters. Out of conflict you learn something. What can happen is that in a conflict situation I can learn that I can utilise this individual in doing certain things—you learn out of conflict. I can say that my training, in that regard, was practical (Interview with School Principal 13).

So, despite a lack of clear focus on conflict management as a stand alone theme or module highlighted in the previous chapter, there were school principals who had derived important lessons from EMDPs regarding effective management of conflict in schools.

Other principals alluded to what they had learnt in relation to other basic management principles:

> Look, what [the training has] done for me, it has made me look at planning, strategic planning how to look ahead rather than waiting for incidence to occur and things to be happening. It has allowed me to plan well ahead, and when one plans well ahead it offers the school or the institution to move smoothly (Interview with School Principal 3).

> I learned that to be success, to be a successful leader… you have to plan your things, you must have a vision. One of the things they stress is that a leader must have a vision. But in achieving what you are planning to do, in achieving what you want to do, everything starts with a plan…. then I learnt that everything at the end you must review whether this has been achieved, if it has been achieved what more can we add, if it wasn't achieved then where the problem, where can I point the problem, you see. What changes can I bring out in order to achieve the desired results, you see…. Something I learnt as a leader is that if you are a leader you must be consistent (Interview with School Principal 21).

> Actually I can say that my specialisation in Education Management it dealt exactly with the issues that we are confronted with at schools, like decision making, planning, organisational behaviour, you see…. One of the, one of the topics that impressed [me] was the topic on how to make a school effective, how to run a school effectively, what makes a school to be effective, you see (Interview with School Principal 7).

The latter comment corroborates the statements by the EMDP providers — the University Departments' university lecturing staff — that they had indeed focused on issues around school effectiveness.

Another principal also placed some emphasis on the importance of strategic planning:

> The other thing [I learnt] is planning, strategic planning; the idea that if you haven't planned you can't be successful. What I do, eh, what I learnt at the same time about planning is that it doesn't mean that once

> you've planned there will not be any hiccups, you know. So, what I've learnt is that we sit down and we plan, like as the year begins we decide on the things that need to be done. Continuously we evaluate in our meetings—monthly we have staff meetings—where we evaluate whether our programme is still going well, what needs to be reviewed, and so on (Interview with School Principal 28).

Beyond illustrating his understanding of the importance of strategic planning, this principal also emphasized the importance of constantly monitoring and reviewing the plans. He tied this with the notion of shared decision making and the importance of communication.

> We are open to the review of things because you can find that our planning has a problem, we need to be flexible in our planning… However, what is important is that I should not change decisions alone, we need to sit down in a meeting and engage in a review so that everyone can be informed because communication in an organization is very important. People should not merely see things happening without being informed. That would lead to the formation of informal leaders – I learnt that in the programme—which will result in the formation of cliques in the school (Interview with School Principal 28).

Another principal also related the knowledge she had gained from the importance of planning, to the importance of working within a team.

> I think one important aspect for me has definitely been the strategic planning which was covered in one of my modules, where I actually had to do an assignment and I chose to base the assignment on my own institution and although I've always been aware of the significance of planning, I think the Ed[ucation] Management course has made me understand that I'm just one person in this whole team and that I need to, you know, just not impose my beliefs on everybody there but to draw from what is in the institution (Interview with School Principal 9).

What the comments of this principal also indicated was that she had learnt the importance of collaborative shared decision making, something that — as alluded to previously — school principals were not accustomed to in the past. Later during the interview, this principal supported her argument by pointing out how she, in fact, deals with dissenting voices in her staff members:

…we have individual thinkers but I encourage that, eh, I don't find that vexing. We often get somebody at a staff meeting who is opposing but I look at it this way that maybe ninety percent of us were looking at it from one point of view and ten percent or that one percent who is giving us that different angle, is actually giving us something to think about. So, personally I think with all the experience one learns that don't take something—I mean if somebody is not agreeing with you, you don't take offence to that but try and make the best of it, possibly try and look at it from that person's angle (Interview with School Principal 9).

It would seem to me that most of the programmes that the school principals underwent at the universities in KZN placed an emphasis on transformational leadership and the importance of involving all the stakeholders in decisions and also ensuring that they buy into the change efforts being introduced in school. This is encapsulated in the responses of the principal below:

> Another thing that I learnt—we were learning about the learning organisation—that while as a leader you can take change in a positive way, but if the rest of the people in the organisation have not bought into the change, you will have a problem. I always encourage my colleagues, not that they have to go to universities and colleges, but merely reading a newspaper to be updated, when circulars arrive [from the district office] I always make sure that all the teachers have access to them so that things should not always come through me. What I sometimes do is that I give one of the teachers a circular and ask him to go and prepare and then come and present to the staff. I try to make sure that things coming from the Department [of Education and Culture] receive wide ownership in the school (Interview with School Principal 13).

At another level, school principals indicated that EMDPs had assisted them to deal effectively with the post-apartheid conditions:

> I think my training has helped me in many ways to cope with the situation after 1994 (Interview with School Principal 18).

> The training I got at the university really empowered me to live up to the challenges of the new dispensation, that really empowered me (Interview with School Principal 19).

If you were to refer to the style of management I would say it was fortunate that I had that training at the University of _____ for my Masters degree which prepared us for the new dispensation. So, that kept me going because I was advantaged in the sense that I was current on what is to come because the universities, you would understand that, are also involved in a way in policy making (Interview with School Principal 22).

The latter principal further indicated how the programme he had attended had assisted him in terms of understanding the different leadership styles.

So, we were trained in that way at the University to understand what is going to come, so that placed me at an advantage because this democratic way of leadership, the participatory style of leadership I learnt it from the University and it was a challenging period where you had to move from a system where all the authority centred around the principal and all of a sudden you have got to open up and be inclusive in the decision making (Interview with School Principal 22).

Another principal indicated that the programme he had attended had assisted him to better understand his role as a principal in the post-1994 conditions:

I dare say the training I got really opened my mind about education. And it has, to an extent, helped me in shaping my views on education and what my role as a principal should be in this post-apartheid period…. Maybe it was not as dynamic as it is now, changing as it is now but it has helped me to a great degree (Interview with School Principal 19).

It would seem that generally the principals in this study learnt critical lessons regarding change and change management. Citing a particular module offered at the university where he had studied, one principal illustrated this understanding by arguing that:

There's a module that I did called "Managing Change in Education" which taught us about having a positive attitude towards change and not taking change as a threat to you; when there are new things you must always be prepared to learn new things. I think that is very important – to have a positive attitude towards change, accept it and be a long life learner so as to be able to face and deal with change (Interview with School Principal 13).

One of the aspects that a number of principals in this study (17 out of 31) highlighted about the EMDPs that they had been exposed to was that these programmes provided opportunities for them to share and learn from the experiences of others. In other words, these principals explained what they had gained from EMDPs in terms of the opportunities that the leadership and management development classes presented them to work, share and learn from experiences of principals coming from diverse contexts or backgrounds:

> We were given assignments and we had to make presentations, you see. A lot of helpful information came out from different people, from different schools with different backgrounds, like—our class was a class of diversity… so it was a very diverse class. That helped us, you see, it helped you as a manager, you see, to implement those things that you heard these other people are doing. And if you read the literature, when I read the literature I found that some of the things are mentioned even in the literature, these are the things that can make the school to be effective (Interview with School Principal 7).

Other school principals also echoed the fact that they had learnt from the experiences of others in EMDPs:

> …there's a wealth of knowledge, experience from other educators and other managers in other institutions… I must say from my studies I've realised [that] there's a rich source of knowledge and experiences there (Interview with School Principal 30).

> I think what I learnt a lot in um, in my studies, um, I learnt a lot from the class discussions—in my Masters programme we used to have seminar-type discussions where principals shared experiences based on their schools and other schools in their areas. And out of these discussions I learnt a lot about how other principals were tackling certain problems… (Interview with School Principal 22).

> I really appreciated the information that other students used to share in class. Just knowing that other principals were also struggling with issues that we were struggling with, was very comforting. I think I benefited a lot from the discussions, it helped a lot in terms of my own management in my school (Interview with School Principal 23).

One principal in this study said that he now saw his leadership and management development classes as providing opportunities for socialising with other principals, while at the same time being engaged in problem solving:

> I'll say BEd [Honours] classes are a very good socialising factor for principals, we hardly get to socialise. I'll tell you why, many a problem are resolved through socialising. The mere fact that I know you, I can talk to you about the problem that is a plus (Interview with School Principal 31).

While it may sound unusual for a principal to perceive of a formal professional development programme as providing an avenue for socialising with other principals, this is understandable given the argument that professional isolation is in fact endemic in the job of a school principal (Buckingham, 2001). Daresh and Male (2000) have also described newly appointed school principals reporting feelings of alienation and isolation. In fact, in a review of an innovative consultation programme for school principals in the USA state of Massachusetts, Kagey and Martin's (1982) findings indicated that the programme appeared to help relieve the isolation of principals while providing them with a means for processing ideas and actions.

Interestingly enough, a few principals in this study (4 out of 31) indicated that they were part of structures in their areas known as Principals' Forum. One of the principals explained how the structure had begun:

> …[it was] just an informal forum initially started to cry on each others shoulders at a time of change over when we were all battling, all of us were acting principals and we had this 'what would we do next' kind of thing (Interview with School Principal 6).

I would argue that the importance of such a forum cannot be overemphasized, particularly in the context of the professional isolation experienced by school principals. I would further argue that it is such forums that can go a long way in terms of assisting school principals to

form important networks that would provide a spring board against which they can test ideas and develop better strategies towards improving their schools.

In general, it seems that principals in this study appreciated the opportunities for sharing and learning from others' experiences, as illustrated by the sentiments of this principal:

> [the programme] offered me an opportunity at that particular time, especially from a BEd [Honours], to work with colleagues… coming from Zululand together with other educators coming from places like Amanzimtoti. So, I had the White educator and the Black educator together with myself [Indian], and the interaction thereof, you know, made me look at things differently. And that apart from the curriculum itself, the interaction, the personal interaction had given me a wider range of thought (Interview with School Principal 3).

The same principal later indicated that "the interactions made me wiser." In fact, it seems that the class interactions and opportunities to share and learn from the experiences of others also culminated in the development of networking beyond lecture rooms amongst the school principals. As another principal who had also spoken highly of sharing and learning from others in EMDP classes indicated:

> I contact my other colleagues to find out if I'm acting correctly because out of that you make a well informed decision because, as you know, as far as I'm concerned learning is so dynamic and there's not any one individual who knows everything (Interview with School Principal 27).

This idea of seeking assistance from other principals was also echoed by another principal who indicated that:

> I do consult those principals who were in my [BEd] Honours class in certain aspects, and I know what their strengths are—for example, Mr. _____, I know he is good in financial management and he is even a facilitator. So I am able to go to him and consult him on certain things and ask him, 'how do you go about on such and such things' (Interview with School Principal 20).

There were a number of other aspects that school principals mentioned which they attributed to their leadership and management development programmes. For instance, one principal mentioned how she had learnt the importance of reflective practice and how in fact one of the modules had assisted her to become a reflective practitioner:

> I think _____'s [name of university lecturer] module made me do a lot of introspection, you know, a lot of reflection and made me look at what I'm doing more critically and I think when one does that, one learns. So a lot of introspection, and reflection, you know. Before the word reflection was just a word for me coming from, you know being English. That I must say contributed to the process at university, you know, it has made this very significant impact, I definitely have become a more reflective practitioner (Interview with School Principal 9).

Another principal mentioned how the EMDPs had assisted him to become a critical thinker:

> The second thing that my studies have helped me [with] is critical thinking… the very same thing, you know, the critical attitude that you have you'll apply it in other things. So there comes a document from the Department, a circular, "lets do it like this", firstly you'll read the circular, because reading is not something that you are adverse to, secondly there will be things that will strike you as you are reading the circular, you know, the first reading, but look you are a critical man now, the Department is saying you must do it like this but isn't this conflicting with something else (Interview with School Principal 15).

Five other principals mentioned how the EMPDs had helped to develop in them the habit of reading and in fact developed them into life-long learners:

> Look, I would say that all my studies have helped me firstly to—I realized or I'm in the habit now, it engendered this habit of reading (Interview with School Principal 15).

> [my studies] encouraged me to read and I think the best thing is that I still read, I still find myself going to the library and borrowing books on management (Interview with School Principal 9).

> …my interest in educational management keeps me reading all the time and trying to look for new ideas because I find that once I've got a project underway, once one project is out of the way, I'm looking for another project to do (Interview with School Principal 6).

I must give a lot of credit to the Masters programme [in Educational Management] as well and the readings. And again I must say that I continue to read… (Interview with School Principal 1).

I have a whole host of research journals and things like that. Reading is very important to me, and it is something that I developed throughout my Masters degree (Interview with School Principal 22).

Despite all the positive sentiments expressed by a number of principals about how the EMDPs had impacted positively on their school practice, there were principals who were very critical of the education management development programmes offered at the universities for school principals. For instance, one principal who had been a recipient of a BEd (Honours) in Education Management expressed the view that:

I didn't receive training *per se* for this job, I'm saying I received training from a general perspective and I'm applying it here (Interview with School Principal 2).

According to this principal, courses such as the BEd (Honours) were "basically academic qualifications" and were "insufficient" in terms of the practicalities of the job of a school principal. However, the same principal did acknowledge the importance of what he considered to be an academic qualification and how it had assisted him:

I guess it [the BEd (Honours) qualification] was helpful, it widened my horizons about the different models and perspectives in education and the way in which I could harness that and practice it (Interview with School Principal 2).

He nonetheless still maintained that "reality and the real practice of theory, [are] two different things." The notion of EMDPs being theoretical and being mainly academic qualifications not rooted in practice was also expressed by another school principal who argued that:

That [BEd (Honours)] didn't help me. I got more theory… It just gave me the academic knowledge, provided the academic background… (Interview with School Principal 26).

Other principals, however, had a different take on the contrast between theory and practice.

As one principal put it:

> I think they [the qualifications] have, they most certainly have helped me because both the Masters degrees in Educational Management and Administration[47], dealt with theory but dealt with practice as well. And whatever theory we did we then applied to our situation (Interview with School Principal 6).

He went further to indicate how the programme had assisted him in his job as a principal:

> I still use some of the materials from there [university]. So, I find that [the training] had given me either directly or indirectly the necessary chance to, um, get into the post and to be effective (Interview with School Principal 6).

Interestingly enough, one of the school principals felt that most of the courses offered in the programme for school principals that he had attended lacked a theoretical basis:

> My belief is that there should be theory and practical components, you know, so that you take something, you give them background theory to it that you can apply to, apply it in practice. So, I'll, I would say you need to get these courses where—there must be a theory base and this is what we're not getting… there isn't a theory base from which to work. Provide the necessary theory, if you're talking motivation then talk of Maslow's hierarchy [of needs] and Hapsburg and so forth and so on, and then show them a practical example or a case study… on how it could apply in practice (Interview with School Principal 22).

School Principal 22 then provided a practical example of how he had in fact applied the theory he had learnt in his leadership and management development programme, to a practical situation in his school:

> I looked at Maslow's theory of um, motivation and I, in my staff room—I spent one holiday and I got a little kitchenette for them: stove, four plate stove, oven, microwave, fridge, good crockery, cutlery, *etcetera*, and a little kitchen hall for everybody. And when they came back from the holiday they were walking on air for two weeks (Interview with School Principal 22).

---

[47] This principal had two Masters' degrees – one from a University in KZN and another from an overseas (UK) university – and constantly made reference to both degrees during the interviews.

Yet another principal, while acknowledging some of the limitations of the theory that he had learnt, provided a very positive take on the value of theory. He further provided examples of how a particular module had assisted him in his work as a principal.

> The thing that prepared me most is my BEd Honours [degree] specialising in [Education] Management, it gave me a lot of theory – although with certain practical things when one tries to implement them, this becomes impossible. But the theory that I got, let me say in my [BEd Honours] Management [degree] I majored in School Effectiveness… in the School Effectiveness [module], one of the things, the characteristics of a good school, I learnt that, I know what is a good school. Sometimes one does find that certain things are ideal, but at least one is able to make a distinction—like in School Effectiveness, we were learning about how you can make a school to be self-sustaining, in terms of fund-raising and things like that. These are the things that one is dealing with at the moment. So that course was able to prepare me a lot (Interview with School Principal 31).

Further singing the praises of theory, this principal indicated that, "[T]hat theory that I learnt, at least I try to practise it and I can see that it is working."

There were school principals in this study who credited the leadership and management development programmes with assisting them to deal with the practical management issues at school. Another school principal (School Principal 13) was able to illustrate the point by explaining what he had learnt from one the modules that he had undertaken:

> Another thing that I learnt in the "Management of People in Education" module is that people come with problems from home to work. So what you need to do is that as a principal – while not compromising the work that needs to be done in school – you should show concern when they inform or report to you their problems, you must give support and even give advice, guide a person as to how they could go about dealing with their challenges. At the same time you should not compromise the work that needs to be done in school. Adding to that is that as a principal, the staff development programmes that are put in place in school should be based on the needs of the teachers (Interview with School Principal 13).

Then he went on to indicate how one would apply the knowledge gained from such a module, in practice:

> For example, you can find that there are teachers with debt problems, if these debts are affecting their performance in the school, then they need to be addressed. This is because such a teacher's work may have no value to him because when he gets paid all the money goes towards paying off debts. So, he ends up not seeing the importance of coming to work and doing an effective job because he spends the money even before he has received it. So, what I can do as a principal in the school is to organize a workshop on financial management to address that problem so that teachers could learn how does one do a budget, you see, how do you spend money, you understand, because it is their own problem but indirectly it affects their school work performance resulting in work not being done well (Interview with School Principal 13).

Other principals were also able to provide examples of how different modules had been able to assist them in their practices:

> For me I have opportunities to practice what I learnt in the [EMDP]. When I joined this school in 1997 we did not have a mission statement, we did not have a vision, we did not have school development plans and so on. Then I said, 'guys, let's sit down and talk about these things.' I said to them, 'you've been to companies where you see in the reception area that they have some mission and vision statements. If we are to run our schools as businesses, we are also expected to have that.' We looked at a number of different organizations' mission and vision statements in order to help us construct ours, so that we can say as a school this is what we want to achieve as an organization. Then we started working on [our mission and vision statements] (Interview with School Principal 14).

Another principal explained how the EMDP had assisted her to effectively engage in the process of delegation and to understand the notion that leadership does not reside only with those holding formal positions, but should be shared throughout the organisation.

> I've taken the time off now to get to know the staff much better and if there's some kind of delegation perhaps, you know, I look at so many factors before I actually engage in [delegation] and I find that it's become such a rich worthwhile activity, not just for me but for that staff member because I think one thing and _____'s [name of university lecturer] module also taught me very strongly is that there's leaders

not just in management but you have leaders right from level one (Interview with School Principal 21).

When asked about the value of the leadership and management development that he had undergone, one of the principals that I interviewed (School Principal 11) opined that one did not necessarily need a qualification to be an effective school leader. As he put it:

> I must say just one thing that you don't need any qualification to be a leader because if you look at the Black schools, lots of principals in the Black schools don't have any qualifications, but they're doing their work, they're leaders in their own right (Interview with School Principal 11).

He went further, in an effort to strengthen his argument, to cite an example about one of the political leaders in South Africa who is said to have minimal formal education:

> You look at Jacob Zuma [the current South African President], he's just got Standard one but, but it doesn't mean you have to have an education to be a leader; it's an innate quality that comes from inside (Interview with School Principal 11).

In fact this principal (School Principal 11) emphatically indicated that he believed that:

> You don't need education to be a leader in the school. So what I'm saying is education to me is of no importance, you can have the highest amount of education yet you cannot be a leader (Interview with School Principal 11).

Although the views of this principal sound quite extreme, his argument that an individual can be educated and still fail to lead effectively, is worth noting. I should mention that this principal had 24 years experience as an educator — five years of which he had been a school principal. He had moved from post level one educator to school principal, had previously worked in the motor vehicle industry, and had a BEd (Honours) degree in Education Management.

5.6 Do school principals feel adequately equipped for the post-1994 conditions in their schools? Do they feel adequately equipped to manage change in their schools?

Having dealt with the question of whether school principals felt EMDPs were effective or not in relation to their roles post-1994, I then inquired as to whether school principals felt adequately equipped to deal with these post-1994 conditions and to manage change effectively. It should be mentioned that not all of the school principals who indicated that EMDPs had been useful to them in relation to their roles under the changed circumstances in schools, felt that they had been adequately equipped to deal with post-1994 conditions in schools. For instance, despite having indicated that he had learnt quite a number of things from his EMDP courses, School Principal 7 felt that the programme had not adequately equipped him to deal with the post apartheid conditions that existed in his school. Responding to the question of whether he felt adequately equipped to deal with post-1994 conditions, he indicated that:

> No, I think, um, it [BEd Honours] did not. It did not, um, because what I noticed with the BEd [Honours] from _____ [one of the KZN universities], it was good but it lacked the contemporary materials. The current issues were not added there, you see, like, um, these transformation things, they were not added there (Interview with School Principal 7).

This principal further cited legislation or education law as one area where the programme he had attended was lacking and again, went on to compare the programme he had attended with a programme offered by another university in KZN:

> I compared _____ [same university mentioned above] and the University of _____ [another University] I found that they are lacking somewhere and the _____[the former University] is lacking somewhere... I expected _____ to bring in things like new amendments, like legislations, like the school um, school governance, what does the school governance say, the disputes that are there, you see. Like the training people on how to deal with the disputes in a

proper manner like the Labour Relations Act is expecting, you see, look at the interpretation because there you are training leaders, people who are doing BEd [Honours] they are there to be leaders…. On the aspect of legislation, school legislation I felt that _____ [name of University] did not do it in a, it was lagging behind on that (Interview with School Principal 7).

Another principal also echoed the sentiments of School Principal 7 in relation to the issue of the recentness of learning materials. However, his focus was more on the use of case studies—current case studies—as teaching and learning tools:

> I think they must add something, they must add something which is current, they can do a case study, which is current; maybe they can go out to the Department [of Education] and ask for case studies that have been done. Then from there, they can, um, I think these things will be helpful because they'll be dealing with the current issues, how to deal with conflict in a current situation taking into account the legislation… (Interview with School Principal 27).

It is worth mentioning that School Principal 7 completed an EMDP at the University of Port Shepstone in 1996. Subsequent to that, three years later (1999), the BEd (Honours) programme was restructured under the leadership of Mr. Cebekhulu who, *inter alia*, incorporated current topics and introduced legal aspects into the content of both the BEd (Honours) and the Masters programmes in education leadership and management. So, School Principal 7's comments should be understood within that context.

Another principal in this study indicated that he felt inadequately equipped to deal with changed conditions in school because of a lack of financial management knowledge and skills:

> Perhaps one aspect I can mention is the one of financial management. I believe that if you are a principal you do need to have financial management because you are an accounting officer, you have to assist the SGB. I do see that I need financial management so that I can be clear on financial matters so that I can make sure that when we submit the financial statements to the auditors, at least we should send

something that we ourselves can see that we were able to do, that we did manage money correctly (Interview with School Principal 1).

This principal felt that financial management was an area where he required some professional development. There were a few other principals (12 out of 31) in this study who mentioned financial management as one of the areas where they felt they were least developed. Some of the examples of the quotes from these principals are as follows:

> In both my BEd [Honours] and Masters degrees in Education Management at the University of _____ [name of one of the universities in KZN] I did not receive any training in financial management. In fact, after completing both degrees I felt a bit impoverished in the area of financial management (Interview with School Principal 18).

> During my training at University I did not receive [training in] financial management skills, I got [financial management skills] from other workshops I was exposed to, workshops that was, one workshop was organized by NBI [National Business Initiative]… on managing finances and fund-raising (Interview with School Principal 20).

> [The training] helped to an extent in terms of, it wasn't in the nitty-gritty of financial management, but overall budgeting and things like that. There was a small aspect in one module somewhere that dealt with financial management, but the practice, the actual practical part of it was more in-house, on-the-job training (Interview with School Principal 9).

What is of interest is that the latter two principals cited above had received financial management skills outside the formal EMDPs — although one of the principals indicated that there was an aspect of financial management in one of the modules he had registered for. The point is, in general, almost half of the principals in this study (12 out of 31) felt that they were inadequately equipped in as far as financial management is concerned — an area which was pointed out by a majority of school principals in this study (19 out of 31) as an area in which present day principals need to be *au fait* in. One of the principals suggested that financial management training should be made compulsory for all principals:

> I can suggest that financial management should be compulsory for everyone… some principals do get criminally charged for mismanaging school funds, not because they had an intention to squander the money, but because they don't have the skills to handle money appropriately (Interview with School Principal 13).

The views of School Principal 13 are congruent with the views of the Director in the national Department of Education. During the interview with the Director, Mr. Bruce Shaw, he also cited cases where principals had been criminally charged with the misappropriation of school funds. His argument was that in some instances it was a case of principals not being able to account and keep proper records as opposed to deliberate embezzling of funds. He therefore emphasised the importance of ensuring that school principals are well equipped with financial management skills.

There was another group of school principals — mainly "Indian" principals — who felt that EMDPs had not adequately equipped them to deal with the multicultural contexts that they found themselves working in, post-1994. As discussed earlier in the section on the changes in the leadership and management of schools pre- and post-1994, these principals indicated that there had been major changes in the racial and cultural composition of their student body. They later cited the issue of dealing with these learners from varied racial and cultural backgrounds as one of their vexing challenges.

> I lack working with different cultures, I was always educated in Indian mentality, you went to an Indian University, you went to an Indian college and you came out as an Indian educator, for a particular sector of the community. I was not given any training when this adjustment took place from racism to a multi-racial society (Interview, School Principal 2).

> You know, the time that we were trained, we were trained with only one group of persons. The subject content when you came out of the institution you went into a compartment, you know. Now it's totally different. The management is totally different because we don't live in compartments anymore, we don't live in isolation anymore (Interview, School Principal 5).

> …the multicultural thing is one area where I feel that I am lacking. You see, it is a very, very important issue at school… At our school we have many different race groups even though the school was established for Indians because of House of Delegates. There are other race groups that come to our school who are from the area… I feel that this [multiculturalism] is one area that I was not trained in (Interview with School Principal 10).

> Dealing with multicultural situations is another important point which we never had in our BEd [Honours] degree. It was all this one group that you dealt with (Interview with School Principal 12).

It was not only "Indian" school principals who felt that the programmes that they had attended had not adequately equipped them to deal with multicultural contexts. As one Black principal eloquently argued:

> I would put myself in a new non-racial dispensation and say that our programme was lacking in the sense that a principal of a Black school would also be stereotyped to marry the practice with an experience in a Black school. A principal of a White school would marry the theory to the experience of a Whites-only school. Had we been afforded an opportunity to visit different areas, one would have benefited in different exposure which would have prepared one for the new dispensation which does not segregate in terms of the races. So, in that score I would say we were programme-deprived because it relied solely on your own experience, which was not necessarily exposing you to the new dispensation, which is non-segregating (Interview with School Principal 19).

There were, however, school principals who felt that they were adequately equipped to deal with the post-1994 conditions (17 out of 31). Some principals indicated that EMDPs had equipped them to manage change or at least to understand what change meant and how to approach and deal with staff during the changing period. In response to the question of whether they felt adequately equipped to deal with the post apartheid conditions, some principals responded thus:

> Yea, in a way, you know. I mean, at least we were prepared that change needs to happen over time and really it's happening, we can't force [teachers] to change overnight and once there are changes, you know,

people become sceptical, not knowing what's next [that is] going to happen (Interview with School Principal 8).

> *Ja* [Yes] I'm prepared, I'm prepared, but my preparedness as I was saying that change is a constant thing – my preparedness is based on the fact that, as I was talking about a learning organisation, I am prepared that as we try to build a learning organisation, I have to continuously learn. Whilst I have that attitude that I have to constantly learn, it means that I will have information about how to implement any change that comes along (Interview with School Principal 13).

In fact, one principal went as far as citing the particular module where he had learnt about

change management in the programme he had attended:

> Another module that we did was the one on change, where we were looking at the Management of Change – people like Michael Fullan, I mean, quite a lot of things that we learnt there: what is change, how do people respond to change, and so on. One of the sub-topics that we looked at was the issue of the school as a learning organisation—what do we mean when we say an institution is a learning organisation (Interview with School Principal 14).

Generally, there were principals who felt that they had been empowered and enlightened by

having attended education management development programmes:

> …what [the programme] has done for me is that it has given me more, it has empowered me to become enlightened so that when I'm looking at any problems peculiar to my school against the background of what I know, I'm better able to respond to the call (Interview with School Principal 14).

Other principals indicated that they felt that they were adequately equipped to deal with the

challenges of their positions and in fact, the programmes assisted them to execute their

duties with confidence:

> After completing the course it gave me a lot of confidence that now I can stand up as a manager (Interview with School Principal 7).

> …my degree [BEd (Honours): Education Management], you know, gave me that confidence. You know what I'm saying, it built my self-esteem, and confidence… (Interview with School Principal 10).

I don't think one can say that they're totally prepared for anything because often you get a new challenge, but I'm quite confident in doing my job, I suppose it's again all my experience and also the fact that I've undertaken studies (Interview with School Principal 25).

Related to the aspect of EMDPs providing school principals with confidence to execute their duties effectively, was the ability to deal with matters in schools, which the principals attributed to the programmes they had attended. As these principal indicated:

I think I was well prepared but though one may not say one is perfect. I think I would say overall, for the work that I'm doing or the work that I'm doing up to now, I think I was well prepared. Why I say that is because I feel I am able to handle situations no matter how difficult they may be, I'm still able to handle them. But as I was saying I'm not perfect, you learn all the time, the dynamics change and you also adapt to different situations (Interview with School Principal 20).

As a person I'll say yes. One is always reading all the time so that one would be up to date with information and be up to date with the changes. But I feel that the training that I've done and I'm still doing is helping me a great deal…. What I have done, I would say, it has helped me a lot, it's still helping me a lot. Yes, it has helped a lot, and it still does help a lot (Interview with School Principal 14).

5.7   EMDPs and practical experiences/field-based learning opportunities

During individual interviews with school principals, one of the questions that I asked related to whether their leadership and management development included any practical or field-based learning opportunities in the form of an internship programme or shadowing, for instance. I further asked — if in fact their programme contained a practical element — whether they had found the experiences useful in regard to their own practices as school principal and how.

All the participants in the sample of this study either undertook programmes that <u>did not</u> offer opportunities for practical experiences/field-based learning experiences, or the participants did not utilise those opportunities in cases where the opportunities existed. The major reason for this situation — particularly in the case of EMDPs that did not offer practice-based experiences — was that these programmes had a requirement that individuals registering in the programmes needed to be practising principals. However, as rightly pointed out by one of the principals in this study, the reality was that not all individuals who registered for these programmes were in fact practising principals:

> No, there wasn't [a practice-based component]. There was none… they [providers] assumed that because we are in these fields—perhaps a weakness of the BEd [Honours] programme in any institution—it is said that preferably people in management positions must apply. But I'm aware that quite a number of people who are doing BEd [Honours] at the University of _____ [name of a university in KZN] or at the University of _____ [name of a university in KZN] are not necessarily in management positions. So, we were not doing any practicals because it is assumed that these things, *vele* [as a matter of fact] these things we are doing. But then the mistake part of that is that not really that we are doing them all of us (Interview with School Principal 14).

There were principals who felt that they did not need to undertake any practical experiences during the leadership and management development mainly because they were already practitioners/principals. For instance, one principal who studied at a university that offered an internship component argued that:

> When I did MEd [Education Management] there was a module, the internship, but for me it was not of much value because I was already in an acting capacity in my own school. So I actually spoke to one of the lecturers concerning this module and he said, "no, you are already a manager at your school." I mean I was [the] acting principal, so for me there was no need because I was getting, I was doing the job basically except my title was acting principal (Interview with School Principal 9).

It should be mentioned, however, that the same school principal acknowledged the importance of such experiences:

> I think it's important because, you know, there are no induction programmes. When I became a principal there was no training for me… I took the initiative to engage in a Masters programme (Interview with School Principal 9).

School Principal 9 went further to suggest that some form of mentorship should be put in place by the provincial Department of Education:

> …attaching people to current managers who have proven themselves, I mean, the Department [of Education and Culture] must take the initiative, I think the Department [of Education and Culture] should make the attempt and take the time, and possibly attach up and coming potential leaders to new principals and you would learn a lot (Interview with School Principal 9).

For the most part, practising school principals felt that the fact that they were involved with the leadership and management of their schools at a practical level, made it quite unnecessary for them to undertake field-based learning experiences. As illustrated by this principal (School Principal 18) who had completed both the BEd (Honours) and Masters degrees in Education Management:

> At BEd [Honours] level I had already started management, I had already started doing management and in that way then there was an opportunity of marrying the theory I was getting at university to the practice because I had already started implementing the practice of management at school (Interview with School Principal 18).

Another principal also echoed the sentiments of School Principal 18:

> With us, fortunately further training in management occurred concurrently with the experience, so one did not really need to go out and actually say, "I'm coming to do the practical training of what I'm learning at the university", it happened concurrently seeing that I was already a principal when I was being trained, further trained in the field of management. So, one had that advantage so that when we were engaged in training we were reflecting with the practical experiences (Interview with School Principal 19).

School Principal 19 did, however, acknowledge that even with the opportunities for practising what was taught in the EMDPs, some kind of internship would have been useful:

> I personally would think [internship] is quite necessary, that's where our training was lacking because much as we had that experience, but it would have been ideal or helpful if we were afforded an opportunity of being exposed to other leadership experiences, not necessarily the one where you are practising (Interview with School Principal 19).

The importance of an internship was also echoed by another principal who indicated that:

> I think that internship could be of great value, could be of great help, I have never been exposed to a situation like that and I think I would have loved to be exposed to a situation like that (Interview with School Principal 20).

In some of the programmes offered by the universities in KZN, school principals were exposed to some practical experiences in the sense that (according to one of the principals),

> …they brought in practitioners like, um, long serving principals and um, inspectors, and so forth and so on, to do some sessions with us (Interview with School Principal 6).

As previously mentioned, that School Principal 6 had two Masters' degrees — one from one of the universities in KZN and the other from a university overseas, in the United Kingdom. In the discussion of the issue of practical experiences in EMDPs, he therefore drew attention to his experiences in the United Kingdom. He compared the fact that there were no practice-based experiences in his South African Masters' degree whilst his overseas qualification had a practical component:

> In terms of practical experiences particularly at _____ [University] we did shadowing, you know where we spent time at certain schools over a couple of days, and um, that, that was the main one. And we did visits to schools where we would—schools, local educational authorities [LEAs]… to be able to get the answers to some of our questions that were raised in the theory part of it. So, um, going, you know the practice teaching kind of scenario, going to the school and seeing for yourself exactly what was happening. And what was very interesting as well is that we shadowed management in business, you know, we spent, um, a day or two for example with the manager of

_____ [big commercial shop in the UK], and, um, that was interesting… (Interview with School Principal 6).

A number of interesting aspects of the practice-based learning experiences discussed by School Principal 6 — such as the opportunity to shadow business managers/leaders — provide food for thought and avenues for debates and discussions regarding EMDPs in South Africa. I return to the issue of practice- or field-based learning experiences in the final chapter of this study.

5.8   School principals' greatest professional development needs

It is to be expected that — given the changes that have taken place in South Africa in general and in the education system in particular — school principals would find themselves faced with some vexing challenges. It is also to be expected that some of these school principals would have some areas where they would feel inadequately equipped to deal with the post-1994 conditions — despite having undergone EMDPs — and therefore in need of some professional assistance. It is in the context of that broader background that one of the questions I asked school principals was what their greatest current professional needs were. I further asked the principals as to how they thought these professional needs could be fulfilled.

One of the aspects that was identified by school principals as their greatest area of need was curriculum management, particularly in the context of the challenges that principals had expressed with regards to curriculum reforms in the form of Outcomes Based Education (OBE). The responses of School Principal 13 reflect the general feelings expressed by school principals in this study:

Another need—perhaps the other thing that is there, even though I don't know how it could be addressed, you find that the changes that take place—like now there's gonna be a [Revised National] Curriculum Statement [from the national Department of Education], you find that in the end, the principals—this thing of OBE—principals have to manage the curriculum in the school. Perhaps that's another thing that one has to ensure that one is ahead, gets a better understanding in terms of what is happening in that regard, so that one is able to manage the curriculum and provide proper guidance, because you can't manage something that you do not know (Interview with School Principal 13).

Other principals expressed similar views about the need to involve principals in the professional development that teachers receive with regards to curriculum reforms that have taken place in education:

There must be more workshops regarding for example, OBE for principals. What our Department is doing taking the teachers and workshopping them is good, but we also need to be there so that when we're checking on their work, we know exactly what's happening. So, more training on OBE for principals (Interview with School Principal 15).

…the need to deal with the current changes in legislation regarding curriculum. I must be familiar with everything that is there so that I can guide the pupils to make informed choices in terms of their careers and options and things like that. That is the thing that I currently need most (Interview with School Principal 29).

The general idea expressed by school principals with regards to curriculum management was that they cannot effectively manage the curriculum unless they have the necessary knowledge and understanding of curriculum matters. As one principal aptly put it:

…you cannot critique the teaching, you cannot improve standards at your school unless you are knowledgeable on curriculum matters and so on (Interview with School Principal 15).

Principals in this study seem to be cognisant of the fact that effective teaching and learning is the core business of schools and that school principals play an important role in ensuring that the core business is achieved. As one principal cogently argued:

It is the primary duty of the principal to ensure that effective teaching and learning takes place in school. If you cannot manage the curriculum then there will be problems. You can be good in other things, but if effective teaching and learning is not getting done—which is the primary objective of the clients, the primary objective for parents to bring kids to school—then there is no reason for the school's survival if it can't teach effectively (Interview with School Principal 9).

The fact that principals in this study recognised and highlighted the importance of instructional leadership as a critical area pertaining to the effectiveness of principals in their roles, means that those responsible for developing and designing EMDPs need to take this into consideration when developing and designing these programmes.

Another area of great professional need identified by school principals was around financial management:

[we] should now be given intensive training in budgetary—in running the school as a business (Interview with School Principal 2).

I need more skills with regard to finances, how to raise more money (Interview with School Principal 16).

The [professional] needs that I have, one, is the one on financial management that I mentioned earlier. The way of addressing this need is that next year I will do my Master's degree, and I will do a module in financial management (Interview with School Principal 13).

School Principal 13's response also included a reference to the second part of the question which asked school principals to indicate how they thought the need could be fulfilled. As discussed in another case below, it is interesting that School Principal 13 took personal responsibility for the fulfilment of the identified need — namely, undertaking academic studies.

A number of school principals, mainly "Indian" principals, who had identified working with learners from diverse cultural backgrounds as one of their challenges, also expressed the

view that multiculturalism was one of their greatest areas of professional need. As one principal put it, explaining how behaviour from a different cultural background can be easily misinterpreted:

> We need training on how to deal with multicultural situations, I think that is very important, and you know, like fortunately I know a little about customs and things like that, *imithetho* [rules]. We need people to come here and teach us these things because I know when a Zulu speaking child comes to my office he puts his head down and he sits. Now the rule in my office is that children don't sit and if you don't look at me you're a bloody liar you know (Interview with School Principal 16).

Almost half of the principals in this study (15 out of 31) identified information and communication technology (ICT), mainly basic computer literacy skills, as one of the areas where they needed professional development. Out of these 15 principals, 10 were African principals heading schools with predominantly African learners and educators.

> I'm in dire need of training in the IT [Information Technology]. I think that's where I lack quite seriously (Interview with School Principal 19).

Interestingly enough, this principal saw the possibility of this need being fulfilled at two levels:

> The IT [Information Technology] aspect is two fold, its personal initiative where I would have to cough out my own funds and attend personal development courses on IT. The other aspect of it is the [provincial] Department [of Education] itself as an employer empowering us, capacitating us on IT given the fact that we're in an IT era. So I think I would also challenge the Department to consider doing that because if you're IT illiterate these days you're as good as illiterate (Interview with School Principal 19).

The fact that this principal also saw the fulfilment of this need as partly his responsibility, is quite interesting. It implies that some principals realise that in some instances they do have to take responsibility for their own professional growth and development.

It should be mentioned that some of these African principals who identified ICT as one of their areas of professional needs indicated that although they had been through EMDPs, they were in fact, computer illiterate. As one principal put it:

> There was what they used to call at the University of _____ [name of a university in KZN] computer literacy, but you know, the way that it was done, it was very superficial, very, very superficial because when those tutorials came to an end, I knew nothing about computers. I will not say in fact that it [computer literacy] was anything I gained from my training (Interview with School Principal 20).

Another principal felt strongly that computer literacy should be part of education management development programmes:

> That [computer literacy] is another thing that they are supposed to add because they should—in fact add the computer programme in this BEd [Honours], um, add it there to the degree. Because if the computer course was there, if the computer module was there today… I wouldn't have to go out there and spend money outside. As it is now I don't know computer, yet I'm in the office—it's a challenge to me that I'm not computer literate. It's a challenge (Interview with School Principal 7).

One of the interesting areas of professional needs identified by one of the school principals was the need to train principals to forecast and plan ahead in line with the developments around them — what this principal called "proactive management." To illustrate his point, this principal used various pieces of legislation that had been introduced by the national Department of Education, which, according to this principal, seriously impacted on schools mainly because they were not prepared or had not planned ahead to deal with these reforms:

> I don't know if there's anything like proactive management, if there was something like that I would say we need to train the principals in being proactive because people have the tendency of maintaining the status quo, because a change always comes with challenges and if you maintain the status quo you have created yourself a safety corner, "This is how things are done in our area", and once you implement a change it becomes a challenge because you have got to open up the avenues that you don't know…. Why I'm saying that it's because of the experience that we've had here in this school of FET [Further Education and

Training curriculum], and I'll take it concurrently with R and R, Rationalization and Redeployment and couple it with PPN – Post Provisioning Norm – right. These concepts have impacted quite seriously on the schools. R and R – Rationalization and Redeployment of the teachers impacted on the schools because schools had not been proactive in terms of introducing subjects that are in line with FET, FET which is a policy of the Department, in trying to transform the curriculum (Interview with School Principal 19).

In essence, what this principal was referring to was a situation where, for example, there were schools which were offering subjects such as Biblical Studies and no Computer Literacy, which did not proactively work towards assisting Biblical Studies teachers to get trained in subject areas such as Computer Literacy — in line with the national Department of Education's efforts to bring improvements to the curriculum. As he later posited, "Get people to study the situation which is coming and start or begin doing something now, in preparation for that situation." Unfortunately, when asked as to how this need could be fulfilled, School Principal 19 clearly indicated that he did not have an idea as to how this could be done.

There was also one principal in this study whose professional needs were expressed in terms of the issue of support from the provincial Department of Education:

> Well, my own needs would be more support from the Education Department, more support, more assistance. More assistance from subject advisory service because we are not experts in all subjects, more subject advice, more academic support programmes. More regular visits by subject advisors because this is a secondary school. And that is lacking tremendously. More support from the Department in respect of resources (Interview with School Principal 1).

Indeed, one of the major complaints from schools in South Africa is the lack of support from district officials, particularly Subject Advisors and Institutional Development and Support Officers (IDSOs). A recent doctoral study by Narsee (2006) explored how districts operate in one of the provinces in SA and argued, amongst other things, that a combination of

structural, organisational and resource challenges prohibit districts from providing effective services to schools.

Other areas of professional need expressed by the school principals included the following:

❖ School development planning, school improvement and school effectiveness – "I need to come to grips with school development planning at the macro level and micro level. That is the important thing and I think out of it will come everything else" (Interview with School Principal 6)/"for me it would be in the areas of School Development Plans, School Effectiveness, and School Improvement because one leads to another" (Interview with School Principal 14).

❖ Learner disciplinary measures – "I think we were, um, I think, I'm sure most principals will tell you, right now I think the greatest need we have is dealing with the discipline of learners" (Interview with School Principal 10).

❖ Stress management – "there should be more training for principals regarding how they can manage stress, because I can see lots of principals are leaving because of stress, they get burnout, they just can't make it" (Interview with School Principal 15).

❖ Conflict management/conflict resolution – "there's a dire need for training in conflict management because the conflict will always remain the order of the day, there will always be conflict and I think management is also about handling conflict" (Interview with School Principal 19)/"although we have had help, we've had workshops on [conflict resolution], it doesn't really gear you up for everyday challenges. I would say like, more training on conflict resolution" (Interview with School Principal 17).

❖ Counselling skills – "a principal's role has changed over the years. Maybe that [counselling] should also be included in the BEd [Honours], you know, for future use as a school counsellor as well. We're dealing with it, we deal with it every day" (Interview with School Principal 10).

❖ Drawing up policies at school – "assist principals with drawing up policies on school and running of school" (Interview with School Principal 11).

❖ A focus on understanding departmental policies – "I would like a focus more on the policies of the government because the principals need to understand fully the regulations, the policies, the Acts of the government because their management is dictated to by the Acts of the government and the policies, and the regulations. That's one area that I would say that needs to be looked into quite seriously because that's where we as principals face serious challenges" (Interview with School Principal 19).

5.9 Emerging themes

5.9.1 The role of training workshops

In developing this study the focus was mainly on the formal education management development programmes that the school principals had undergone that are provided by higher education institutions (HEIs) of learning, mainly universities. There was no intention to focus on other types of professional development avenues provided by other providers other than HEIs. Even in the interview schedule the only question that I asked school principals that went beyond formal EMD programmes was whether they had recently attended any short courses, seminars, workshops, etcetera; what the focus of the professional development was; and who programme providers were. In other words, I did not go into any details regarding training workshops — I just wanted to get a sense of what their latest form of professional development had been.

However, during the interviews with the principals, without any probing, they started elaborating on their experiences of training workshops, given the fact that these workshops were used as a major professional development vehicle, particularly in KZN[48]. Indeed, the role of workshops as professional development tools particularly regarding orientating school principals to the policy documents containing new initiatives in the management of schools, seems to be one of the most prominent forms of continuous development for school managers in KZN. These were mainly workshops organized by the provincial Department of Education (KZNDEC) – using a variety of private providers— with the aim of providing school principals with the latest information from the national and provincial Departments of Education. Perhaps most importantly, the workshops were

---

[48] Having worked as a training facilitator myself, providing mainly training workshops for school principals, it was brought to my attention by principals that they were getting overwhelmed by the huge number of workshops that they were required to attend.

meant to provide school principals with practical guidance in terms of dealing with the new conditions under which they had to operate. In the main, the workshops took two forms: they were either information-dissemination sessions or skills development sessions meant to impart a variety of leadership and management skills.

It was therefore for the afore-mentioned reasons that in subsequent interviews with principals I began asking them about their experiences of workshops and what they saw as the role of workshops in so far as their (principals) professional development is concerned.

There were a number of school principals (22 out of 31) who highlighted the importance of workshops in so far as the information-dissemination aspect is concerned:

> They're relevant because they're workshopping the policy documents that have come down from national Education [Department]. For example, DAS [Developmental Appraisal System], Whole School Evaluation, School Development Plans. So, the workshops are on all the new initiatives that have come down from National to Province and from Province to us (Interview, School Principal 6).

Other principals saw the role of workshops more along the lines of helping principals to keep abreast of the developments and changes regarding the leadership and management of schools:

> It's invaluable, it's invaluable. I'm of the firm belief that workshops can keep you abreast, not all of us are studying, not all of us are reading but workshops are an effective way of keeping abreast of changes in your area of practice. It is very important (Interview, School Principal 5).

> I attended a lot of departmental workshops, you know with, um, Effective Management, Whole School Evaluation… definitely that helped me become a good manager (Interview, School Principal 12).

In fact, most principals were able to cite a few examples of workshops that they had attended that focused on imparting some knowledge on a variety of areas, as illustrated by the principal's responses below:

> They gave us development in Finance, School Management, um, the most recent one I've been to is this Quality Assurance Programme… Norms and Standards of School Funding, right. I went to one on Skills Development and Information Sessions. They are now having a lot of workshops for us, you know to, um, uplift us and upgrade us (Interview, School Principal 10).

Although some principals felt there were some problematic aspects in workshops, they emphasized the importance of workshops particularly in the context of the new conditions in schools.

> I would say workshops are very important especially with this new transformation but sometimes when we go we come back disillusioned really. But they give you a lot of material and sometimes we don't have time to go through everything because there is so much [that] just comes and comes… I feel it's very useful and it's important (Interview, School Principal 4).

> I attended a workshop and we did something on change and it helped me to understand that if there is a change there is always reluctance [resistance]. So, whenever I approach people, there is a change now, I always know they are going to be reluctant and I know how to deal with it (Interview, School Principal 21).

However, other principals had a good understanding that although workshops were

> …an essential part of our development, but ultimately they should be seen as a starting point rather than an end in itself (Interview, School Principal 16).

I would argue that this is an important point that needs to be remembered by the departmental officials responsible for what is referred to in the province as EMD — education management development. There are instances when it seems that the workshops are regarded as the beginning and the end in terms of the development of the capacities of school managers.

There were a number of principals in the study (14 out of 22) who saw training workshops as a means of providing opportunities for sharing and learning from the experiences of others. As one principal put it:

> I strongly support the idea of workshops because workshops afford an opportunity of sharing experiences and if you have the right facilitators there's a lot you benefit. The main thing of the workshop is the sharing of the experience because people involved in the workshop have got to speak of their experiences and you benefit out of that. You share your experiences – you may think you know it all, only to find when you're in the workshop that there are people who know better than you do. In the workshops you may think you're doing things the wrong way only to find that you are better off than the other people (Interview, School Principal 19).

Another principal echoed this idea of learning from others by emphasizing the empowering aspect of workshops:

> I like going for workshops because you learn from others… Even if you know how to do things but when you go to a workshop and if there is somebody that tells you I did it this way and it was successful, you come back empowered and if you do it that way you also might be successful, so I find workshops empowering (Interview, School Principal 19).

Yet other principals in this group spoke about the idea of workshops providing opportunities for collaborative problem solving and the notion that there is strength in numbers:

> I think the workshops that we have attended helped us more and more to understand that "look, many minds are better than one mind." And faced with the diversity at our schools, um, we need more brains to resolve the diverse problems we are faced with. (Interview, School Principal 24).

> …when you're at a workshop where particular strengths are involved, if there is a problem area they're discussing you can see sixty or seventy principals giving their perspectives on that problem, it gives you a very enlightening view. And you say "Ag man, I should have thought of that idea there" and then you, you know, from that, in view of those perspectives you gel and you have one common thinking that comes out. It may not be the best but at least there are variations that you can use. I found that a big plus (Interview, School Principal 31).

To illustrate the role of workshops in facilitating learning from the experiences of others, one principal shared the following example:

> …what I've seen in most of the workshops is that most schools are facing a problem in terms of not understanding student population because most of them you find that they've got fifty percent or more of black learners so therefore they encounter problems and [attending workshops] has helped them on how to deal with [the problems] (Interview, School Principal 8).

Indeed in the sample of this study, there were a number of "Indian" schools which enrolled a substantial percentage of African learners (between 25 and 54 percent) but had a 100 percent "Indian" staff complement — 11 out of 14 "Indian" schools in this study. The rest of the "Indian" schools had a few African teachers (between 1 and 4) who were employed mainly to teach the African language, IsiZulu, or who were in SGB posts and not on permanent basis.

Although there were large numbers of principals who saw workshops as one of the best avenues through which principals' professional development could be enhanced, there were also some principals (8 out of 22) who expressed their reservations about this mode of professional development. Amongst the biggest problems expressed by these school principals was the issue of a lack of systematic approach to the delivery of workshops, at times resulting in duplication. This is aptly captured by the example provided by one of the principals in this group. He began by firstly strongly asserting that:

> I'm tempted to say that the workshops are a waste of time… (Interview, School Principal 14).

Then he went on to provide an example to illustrate his disquiet about workshops:

> Let me give you an example, last year we attended a course on School Development Plans in _____ [name of the place] for two days. One principal was complaining there that "but this thing is a repetition", it's a repetition of—there's a programme that is going on

here in _____ [name of the area] that is called Quality Learning Project which is run by _____ [name of consultant]. _____ [name of consultant] has done School Development Planning for secondary schools and he has been very detailed as far as this programme is concerned (Interview, School Principal 14).

Another principal echoed the above sentiments regarding the issue of repetition:

> I would also hasten to say with the workshops in most—in some instances people [SEMs] need to guard against repetition because that is what has frustrated most of us. [For] those who have been in the game for quite some time, it's quite frustrating to be exposed to a workshop that repeats what you have already been exposed to. And that is the problem that we're having with the Department [of Education and Culture] (Interview, School Principal 19).

Amongst other things, the example provided by School Principal 14 illustrates not just problems with workshops themselves, but also the general problem of a lack of coordination amongst different programmes and initiatives provided within a particular circuit or district. Related to that is the issue of an influx of different initiatives, all requiring principals to focus their attention on these initiatives' successful implementation:

> …what's happening, you got the Health Department for example, you've got the AIDS drive on one side, you've got DAS [Developmental Appraisal System] on one side, you've got educational management workshops on one side and you've got a whole host of things. So at the end of the day you have to ask yourself where are we, what have I learnt from all this? There is not much time for the educator to assimilate all the information (Interview, School Principal 18).

There were other principals who felt that they were required by the Department of Education and Culture to attend workshops that they were not supposed to be invited to. For instance, referring to a workshop on the 'Functions and Responsibilities of School Governing Bodies' that one principal was required to attend, he clearly indicated that:

> …these are some of the things that you really feel it's a waste of time (Interview, School Principal 16).

This principal went on to explain that:

> …you call me to a workshop which focuses on the annual budgets and the practical problems, you see, I've been doing this for the past sixteen years now, [yet] I'm expected to attend this workshop (Interview, School Principal 16).

Another principal expressed quite strong views about what he saw as a problem of workshops not being aligned with the realities that principals face on the ground:

> A lot of the workshops disappoint me, I must be honest, a lot disappoint me and I'll tell you why. You'll attend a financial workshop, I'm just going to quote an example, and they'll tell you you're not supposed to keep a R100 in your safe, your banking must be done everyday, it must be done during school time, where's the staff to do that? So, we're getting people that will come and give us these ideas of how a school should be run without understanding how schools operate…. (Interview, School Principal 12).

There is another element of workshops — particularly the information-dissemination workshops — which was highlighted by a few principals in this study. That is, the fact that most of the individuals who present these types of workshops come to the school without a full mandate from either the national or the provincial Departments of Education, and therefore cannot respond to all the queries, particularly those dealing with matters of a technical nature or those dealing with "grey" areas.

> I would say that a lot of these workshops disorientate me because, oh yes, some good things are said, some good ideas are brought across, but in terms of problematic areas I think a lot of loose ends are left which makes me wonder sometimes "why you're wasting my time. I'd rather sit in my school and battle it in my school" (Interview, School Principal 26).

This principal further indicated that:

> …a lot of these workshops tend to, we have, we learn a little but it also disorientates us because the people that conduct the workshops don't have the mandate to make change, "we'll take all your suggestions higher up." I still have to come to a workshop where they say "I've taken forward your suggestions, this is the response from higher up." I haven't got that even when it comes down to your OBE [Outcomes

Based Education]…. We attend all the workshops and we do not get
the required result (Interview, School Principal 26).

What the views of this principal seem to indicate is that principals expect their concerns to

be communicated to the powers that be and for workshops to also play the part of relaying

feedback from the authorities.

It is my contention that the majority of workshops that principals attend are not based on

any formal needs identification and analysis processes. This view is supported by my own

experiences working in the province of KZN as a training consultant, and working with

school principals as a lecturer at one of the universities in the province. However, the school

principals in this study also confirmed this view:

> The programmes that they [departmental officials] come up with are
> programmes that have been, um, thought of by somebody else and
> basically we should have done a needs-analysis, and then prioritize
> (Interview, School Principal 17).

> What they [KZNDEC] do is they just come up with a designed
> package and "here's the workshop that you need to attend." Hardly, they
> hardly engage in [needs analysis]. They just design a package and
> bring it over to us without really looking at whether we need that or
> not (Interview, School Principal 3).

One principal provided a perfect example of a situation where the workshop had no

relevance to the participants, and in fact did not address the principals' needs at all:

> …we went to a workshop on Tuesday, Skills Development workshop.
> Ninety percent of the people there were not interested, they don't pay a
> skills development levy, they don't, you know, they don't have that kind
> of thing. I sat there and asked a lot of questions, unfortunately the
> presenters' got what's in the book, I read the book so it didn't come out
> with anything new (Interview, School Principal 6).

Some principals related the problem of workshops not based on the needs of the principals

to another problem: workshops being organized for the sake of expediency. In other words,

workshops being organized in order to ensure that money is spent before the end of the financial year.

> The workshops that are organized by the Department [KZNDEC] in my view, they are not fruitful. I have reasons, one, they stay without providing any workshops and then towards March, the end of the financial year, they come up with a *number* of workshops to spend money, you understand. Number two, their workshops are not based on people's [principals] needs (emphasis by the participant) (Interview, School Principal 13).

Another principal echoed a similar view when she argued that:

> I personally see these workshops as useless because they are not based on people's needs, they are merely done. Each and every person [Superintendent of Education Management] wants to claim that he has done workshops—they want to have some kind of delivery, to claim that they have done such a number of workshops, to score points and to indicate that in terms of the money "we didn't under-spend" because they [SEMs] are being accused that they are under-spending (Interview, School Principal 23).

Indeed, under-spending of the allocated budget was one of the major problems in the province of KZN, and in particular in the Department of Education and Culture. So, the principals' views in this respect are not further from the truth. Again, having worked as a training facilitator in the province, I can bear testimony to numerous situations where an deluge of workshops were speedily organized between the months of February and March in order to ensure that money was spent before the end of the financial year.

One principal painted an interesting picture of what he would do to attend to the needs of school principals if he had the opportunity of being an SEM:

> …if I were to become an SEM [Superintendent of Education Management] with my principals in the circuit, before I could organize a workshop I would do a needs analysis, and then perhaps I would find out that there are x numbers of principals who need a workshop on financial management. I would target those ten principals and provide them with a workshop on financial management instead of taking

someone who doesn't know why he is attending a workshop on financial management, who does not have any problem [with financial management] (Interview, School Principal 13).

Another problem that was raised by school principals regarding training workshops was the issue of the quality of the presenters or facilitators. As one of the principals in this study argued:

> Workshops are important, they bring new dynamics, provided they are well-structured with well-informed and well-trained facilitators (Interview, School Principal 3).

School principals in this study pointed out their experiences of the problems they had encountered with presenters, using examples of workshops they had attended:

> I attend workshops, for example, on School Governance; I sit in those workshops sometimes in awe because of the standard and quality of presentation…. Some of the factual information that is being distributed is not right because the Acts are changing all the time; they are presenting old information… so part of the training is also incorrect (Interview, School Principal 16).

This principal indicated that during this particular workshop he actually provided some assistance to the facilitator because of the problematic nature of the presentations:

> I called the lady up during the break and said "Let's talk about this, if there's anything you need help on, we'll work on it together", you know (Interview, School Principal 16).

Another principal also shared his experiences:

> I personally went to two workshops on DAS [Developmental Appraisal System], I mean, I had read the manual I learnt nothing new. I would have appreciated if [the presenters] had put us in a situation where we were actually appraising; one of us could have role played as the appraiseé and all the different roles. In both workshops [the presenters] regurgitated what was in the manual (Interview, School Principal 6).

The worst case scenario was the one highlighted by one of the principals where the presenters normally read from notes, without much interaction with the attendees:

> There are a few that engaged in [interaction] but most of them, they call it workshop but it's just a case of notes being printed, sometimes it's just read and I for one get annoyed because I can read myself and, you know, it's time consuming. I could have been given those notes [and] I would have gone home and done the reading myself. I think workshops need to be more practical (Interview, School Principal 9).

What these few quotes indicate is that the quality of the workshop depends to a large extent on the quality of the presenter(s) or facilitator(s). As one principal rightly argued, "[W]orkshops could play an important role if you have the right facilitators" (Interview, School Principal 29).

5.9.1.1 Recommendations by school principals for the improvement of training workshops

Having pointed out the strengths and the weaknesses of training workshops, school principals in this study made a number of constructive recommendations in terms of how the workshops could be improved. These are worth focusing on briefly, particularly given the fact mentioned earlier that training workshops are one of the major vehicles through which the "professional development" of principals takes place in the province of KZN (and to a large extent, in the country). I present these recommendations in point form:

- ❖ Training workshops ought to be on-going and should assist school principals with practical aspects of school leadership and management.
- ❖ Training workshops should deal with "real-life situations, by workshopping actual problems that we encounter on a day to day basis" (Interview with School Principal 1).
- ❖ They have to be well structured and well organized with presenters who are well informed and well trained ("I believe that workshops are important… provided that [they] are well

structured, well organised [and] motivating, with the personnel who are well informed and are also well trained"(Interview with School Principal 3).

❖ Training workshops should be well-thought out with presenters who are *au fait* with the legislation: "if there's too much information coming to the principals and then the presenters tell you that 'Look, I don't have a policy document or I don't know the answer', then you've got a problem and that is what is happening in some cases."

❖ They should be "a catalyst to give you more change" and "open up your thinking" (Interview with School Principal 5).

❖ Training workshops should be longer than one or two days: "workshops that principals go to should be a lengthy period, a week because we can't deal with anything—you take one case study and half the day's gone" (Interview with School Principal 6).

❖ "A lot of practicals need to be put into the theory that we get from workshops (Interview with School Principal 16).

❖ The importance of maintaining the right balance between experienced and inexperienced principals – have "some kind of grouping of people with more or less the similar experience so that those who have not been in the game for quite some time [can] come together with those with the same experience, in that way then you can have one or two people as the resource people for those with little or no experience" (Interview with School Principal 19).

5.9.2 The role of experiences beyond EMDPs in the effectiveness of school principals

One of the critical issues that I could not ignore was the extent to which factors outside the leadership and management development programmes could have had an impact on the perceptions of the school principals and, invariably, on their practices in schools. I would argue, for instance, that it is difficult to say for certainty that a particular principal's effectiveness in his/her school is solely as a result of the EMDP that they would have undergone. It is for that reason that one of the areas that emerged from the interview data became a focus on the role of experiences that school principals have, beyond their education management development programmes.

At one level, there were principals who — although they had received their post-graduate qualifications in the broad area of leadership and management—highlighted and credited qualifications outside the leadership and management discipline for the manner in which they managed and led their schools:

> [in my undergraduate] I majored in Fine Arts. I think that was my biggest help because the arts field, I think it broadens your, your mental abilities to look at things differently, creatively. So, I think that is the only part of my, of my training that helps me to be able to observe and to look at things creatively and to find creative measures to resolve, um, problems that we are faced with. I think that background, that artistic background that creative background has helped me to tackle [problems]—"let's not look at this problem only through blinkers but see how we can look at it from other sides" (Interview with School Principal 12).

> Remedial Education helped me to work with people from different backgrounds, that helped me a lot, coping with changes/transformation, you know, children from disadvantaged backgrounds, battling problems. And also understanding peoples' personalities, problems and all that (Interview with School Principal 11).

Although they recognised the important lesson that they had learnt from the EMDPs, these principals felt that other professional development avenues also made an enormous contribution. Some principals in this study placed a lot of value on what they had learnt from others – such as spouses, parents and former principals:

> My husband actually has taught me to respect people, it's one of the most important things and I think that counts a lot (Interview with School Principal 9).

> …my dad also acted as a principal and he was a deputy principal many years ago and I was involved with him very, very heavily, so I learnt a lot from him in terms of what a school should be like so it was a bit of an advantage when it comes to [managing a school] (Interview with School Principal 12).

> I benefited from being in a school with a democratic principal when I was still a teacher. I learnt some of the things from him (Interview with School Principal 13).

Other principals credited experiences they had gained from working in and with community structures. In fact, there were a large number of principals (17 out of 31) who fell in this category. Below I cite a few illustrative examples:

> I've been a community activist for the last twenty-seven years. I've been actively involved in my communities wherever I have lived.... I've been involved with educational issues, political issues, etcetera. I've been able to relate to the community and whatever experience I had obtained whether it was academic or other incidental forms of learning, have benefited me vastly in relating to my community and assisting in the upliftment and things like that.... even the Masters research has helped me tremendously in my job as a principal, and I have been able to use this in the training that I'm involved in here in _____ [name of area] (Interview with School Principal 16).

> I think the other factor that helped me a great deal – it was my active involvement in the political, eh, in the community activities, in my community. So, my active involvement in the community structures also helped me a great deal and also my active involvement in the political structures in the community also helped me (Interview with School Principal 19).

> Being on the Child Welfare [Community Forum] means to me that there is so much knowledge I get about my community and I apply this knowledge in the management of my school (Interview with School Principal 15).

> I'm quite in sync with community leaders, with the people that actually do the work, like the District Forum, the Education Forum in the area, the social workers and things like that (Interview with School Principal 30).

> ...we were working with the _____ [name of area] Educational Crisis Committee. I used to attend their meetings every Monday and that helped me a lot, I gained a lot from them (Interview with School Principal 21).

Within this group of principals who cited experiences outside EMDPs, there was one principal who attributed his effectiveness as a principal to a wide range of experiences he had gathered over the years, including extensive reading and travel. As he put it:

> ...if you were to ask me what has taught me a lot, I can't really pinpoint one thing but I can say it's a whole host of things, number one: the

people that I meet with, my own experiences in education [and] I've read quite a bit in education… (Interview with School Principal 5).

This principal also attributed his learning to the travelling that he has done:

> I've travelled very widely…I've travelled in many parts of the world, even in Africa. I was fortunate that I was in England, I went to few schools, I was in Mauritius I went to a few schools there, I was in Seychelles I went to a Poly-technical school there, I've visited few schools in other parts of the world. I've learnt quite a lot from all these experiences—important lessons that have assisted me in my work (Interview with School Principal 5).

This principal placed so much value on the experiences that he had gathered over the years that he boldly declared that: "nothing can beat experience; to me experience is the best teacher" (Interview with School Principal 5).

Earlier in this chapter I cited an example of a principal (School Principal 6) that I argued was an active player in the policy implementation process in his school. This principal explained how he had used policies in such a manner that they fitted the context in which he was working. He demonstrated how he had been able to deal with the challenge of OBE by merging OBE with the traditional curriculum in ways that were in line with the policy dictates while at the same time beneficial to the learners in the school. What became of interest to me was that this principal attributed his ability to deal effectively with policy implementation (in the manner that he married OBE with the traditional curriculum), to factors beyond the EMDPs. Below I briefly explore the different aspects that School Principal 6 attributed his successes to. In response to my question as to what extent was his ability to do what he had done with OBE implementation a product of the EMDP he had attended, he responded by indicating that:

> I don't think it's a product of any training, it's more the product of my reading and attending conferences and workshops outside of those organized by the Department [of Education and Culture]. With the

OBE, I attended the conference, SAPA [South African Principals Association] conference in Port Elizabeth… and they had an expert in OBE, Dr. Bill Spady. We had him there and the Ford Foundation in— so I got onto the internet to get materials from the Ford Foundation in Port Elizabeth, to get material from Spadey's books, and brought all of that in and disseminated it – besides reading it myself, I [also] disseminated it for my staff (Interview with School Principal 6).

School Principal 6 was at pains to indicate that what had been responsible for assisting him in his leadership and management of his school were factors beyond the professional development that he had received in both his BEd (Honours) and Masters programmes:

My formal training didn't allow for that [ability to interpret and respond to policy within one's context]. But the out of school—it's my passion for reading and keeping pace that made it possible (Interview with School Principal 6).

It is interesting to note that this principal, School Principal 6, is the kind of principal who not only demonstrates the qualities identified in the research as being critical in relation to instructional leadership (e.g., being a lead learner), but he also encourages his staff to also engage with the materials that he is exposed to by disseminating these materials to his staff in the school:

I've actually, I've got a whole listing of books…. There is a [sic] hundred books that are out from here at the moment… my staff have access to it, so they come, and you know, pick up a book that they want to, they read it and send it back again. The idea is you've got to keep reading to keep abreast (Interview with School Principal 6).

I should point out that School Principal 6 seemed to be an exception to the rule in many ways in so far as the principals that I interviewed in this study are concerned. For example, when I asked him as to where or how did he come across all the information that he seems to possess, he indicated that:

I read the educators' um, education journals and education newspapers and you pick up something…. I learnt of SAPA [South African Principals Association] in the year 2000, it's been in existence since

1995, didn't know it existed. So it's a matter of finding out about it and, um, the internet and the e-mail have done tremendous things for me. I also subscribe to some overseas journals and magazines that are free (Interview with School Principal 6).

Beyond the extensive reading that seems to be the cornerstone of School Principal 6's experiences, he also indicated another dimension which I believe forms part of his learning processes:

> I also do a lot of visits to the ex-Model C schools [so as to not] re-invent the wheel. So if there's something that is there that is good and its working, let's go and have a look at it. And come back and say, 'how can we apply it here.' I [also] go to the ex-HOD schools as well – there's one very good one in _____ [name of the area], _____ [name of the school], who are doing a lot of good work – to see what they are doing that we could emulate (Interview with School Principal 6).

As indicated at the beginning of this brief profile of School Principal 6, what drew my interest to this principal was not only how he had been able to deal with a difficult policy situation successfully, but mainly the fact that he had argued that what he had been able to do was not necessarily attributable to the professional development programme he had attended. This raises intriguing questions and provides avenues for interesting discussions and debates about leadership and management development programmes.

So, to conclude this sub-section, what does all of this — school principals' experiences outside EMDPs — mean? Most assuredly, the fact that these principals felt compelled to highlight these and other experiences of their lives, without prompting, brings some interesting insights to the fore. Amongst other things, it suggests that EMDPs are not the sole source of school principals' learning experiences — other aspects of their lives are also seen by the principals as playing a crucial role. I return to this aspect in the final chapter of

this study to explore what its implications are for education management development programmes and for future research.

5.10   Summary of the key findings

In this section of this Chapter I provide a summary of the key findings pertaining to the school principals' understandings of the challenges and changes that they have to deal with, and their perceptions about the relevance of EMDPs in KZN. It should be noted that the theoretical significance of these findings is provided in the final Chapter of the thesis.

In relation to the *changes in the leadership and management of schools pre- and post-1994,* there is recognition of the need for democratic decision making and involvement of other stakeholders in decisions; recognition of the fact that the job of a school principal has changed from being a purely management task to requiring leadership acumen; and recognition of the legal requirement to include learners at high school level, in the governance structure of the school (SGB). However, some school principals in this study expressed the challenge of engaging in shared decision making and shared leadership, particularly the difficulties of accepting parents as equal and important partners in so far as decisions relating to the governance school are concerned.

There seem to exist a group of principals that I call "progressive and transformative" principals who do not only display a great understanding of the changes that have taken place since 1994, but who have also recognised the need for a paradigm shift regarding school principalship. These principals do not only speak the language of transformation, but also cite examples of how they engage with the practical side of transformational leadership. However, there are other principals in this study who, despite

EMDPs, seem to be resistant to the changes that the new dispensation in South Africa aims to foster. These principals tended to treat the changes with a high level of cynicism and scepticism.

Regarding the *vexing challenges* with which school principals have to contend *under the changed conditions* prevailing in schools, as it would be expected, one of the most recurring themes that emanated from the interview data was the challenge of limited resources. School principals linked the problem of non-payment of school fees to the socio-economic conditions existing in the communities served by the schools — mainly the problems of unemployment and the disintegration of the family structures.

In relation to *SGBs*, school principals expressed the feeling that SGBs are interfering with their (school principals) work and eroding their power and authority. However, despite all the negative experiences shared by a majority of school principals regarding their interactions with SGBs, there were some principals who shared positive experiences in their dealings with SGBs and mostly attributed these experiences to the calibre and the quality of the leadership of the SGB chairperson. It would seem, therefore, that the SGB chairperson plays a critical role in ensuring a good working relationship between the school principal and the SGB.

With regards to the *challenge of policy overload*, school principals expressed the feeling that they were inundated with a large number of policies that they had to implement. Whereas other school principals perceived themselves as helpless policy implementers, a few school principals in this study saw themselves as active players in the policy implementation process. However, school principals also expressed the view that although they were expected to implement the policies of the Department of Education,

they were voiceless and marginalized in as far as policy formulation processes were concerned.

In relation to challenges related to *female school principals*, these principals indicated that they felt that they were not taken seriously because of their gender. There were, however, female principals who indicated that they did not experience any major gender-based challenges.

Pertaining to the *relevance of EMDPs in relation to principalship roles* and aspects of EMDPs that equipped principals to deal with post-1994 challenges, the majority of principals felt that EMDPs had assisted them in understanding and fulfilling their roles. The principals also highlighted the opportunities that EMDPs had afforded them to share and learn from the experiences of other principals from diverse backgrounds. There were, however, school principals who were very critical of EMDPs, some citing the fact that EMDPs were too theoretical and academic qualifications as opposed to being professional qualifications oriented towards assisting them in their roles as principals.

In relation to the question of *whether school principals feel adequately equipped* for post-1994 conditions, some principals indicated that EMDPs had assisted them in managing and leading schools under the changed conditions in SA, but felt that they were <u>not</u> adequately equipped to deal with post-1994 conditions. There were, however, some school principals who felt that they were adequately equipped to deal with post-1994 conditions because of the programmes that they had attended.

Regarding EMDPs and *practical experiences or field-based learning opportunities*, all school principals in this study indicated that they did not benefit from practice-based experiences; the majority of principals acknowledged the importance of these experiences.

In so far as the school *principals' greatest professional development needs* are concerned, principals expressed a variety of needs, particularly the management of Curriculum 2005, information and communication technology (ICT), and other professional needs ranging from training in school development planning to training in the drawing up of school policies.

In relation to the *role of training workshops*, a majority of school principals in this study highlighted the importance of workshops as an information dissemination vehicle; while others perceived training workshops as critical in terms of keeping them abreast of the developments and changes regarding the leadership and management of schools. Yet, other principals saw training workshops as a means of providing opportunities for sharing and learning from the experiences of others; and also as opportunities for collaborative problem solving. However, there were some school principals who expressed their reservations about training workshops, citing mainly the lack of a systematic approach in the delivery of workshops, and lack of needs analysis as major problems.

School principals in this study also highlighted the importance of *experiences beyond EMDPs* in the effectiveness of school principals.

To conclude, in this chapter I have presented, explained and analysed data in respect of the school principals' perceptions of the possible effects of formal university-based education management development programmes on their practical work in schools. I have also explored principals' understandings of the challenges with which they have to contend in schools post 1994 and the extent to which they feel adequately equipped to deal with these challenges.

In the next chapter (Chapter 6) I discuss the findings presented in Chapters 4 and 5, with reference to the relevant literature and the postulations presented in the conceptual and theoretical frameworks of this study.