

SCHOOL PRINCIPALS MEDIATING CHANGE: THE CASE OF RELIGION IN EDUCATION

by

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DEDICATION

This study is dedicated to my husband, Mr Mohale Nthontho for his wisdom, outstanding support, care, love and encouragement. And to my daughters, Itumeleng, Keneuoe and Neo Nthontho who have given me the joy of being their role model.

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DECLARATION OF ORIGINALITY

I, Albertina Maitumeleng Ntho-Ntho (student number 04366697), hereby declare that the thesis entitled: “**School principals mediating change: the case of religion in education**”, for the degree “**Philosophiae Doctor**” at the University of Pretoria, has not previously been submitted by me for a degree at this or any other university; that this is my own work in design and execution and that all material from published sources contained herein has been duly acknowledged.

Signature: _____

Date: April 2013

ABBREVIATIONS

ANC	African National Congress
CESA	Christian Education South Africa
CRC	Convention on the Rights of the Child
DoE	Department of Education
ELAA	Education Laws Amendment Act
ELRA	Education Labour Relations Act
FEDSAS	Federation of Governing Bodies of South African Schools
FET	Further Education and Training
HoD	Head of the Education Department
ICESCR	International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights
LO	Life Orientation
MEC	Member of Executive Committee
MLE	Mediated Learning Experience
NPRE	National Policy on Religion and Education
OBE	Outcome-Based Education
PAM	Personnel Administrative Measures
RSA	Republic of South Africa
SASA	South African Schools Act
SGB	School Governing Body
SMT	School Management Team
SRC	Student Representative Council
UDHR	Universal Declaration of Human Rights
UNCHR	United Nations Charter on Human Rights

DEFINITION OF TERMS AS UNDERSTOOD BY THE STUDY

Religion: A set of beliefs and practices in relation to the transcendent, the sacred, the spiritual, or the ultimate dimensions of human life. According to the South African religion policy, religions are believed to be the key resources for clarifying morals, ethics, and building regard for others.

Education: A human event meant for acquisition of aptitude, capabilities, abilities, interests and some other attributes that may develop a person into a worthy human beings. The study refers to education as a tool any nation could utilise to expose its citizens to diversity in religious and life orientation with the aim of promoting tolerance for different religions and life orientations.

Religion in Education: The link between religion and education with new initiatives in cultural rebirth (the African Renaissance), moral regeneration, and the promotion of values in schools.

Religion Education: A curricular programme with clear and age-appropriate education aims and objectives for teaching and learning about religion, religions and religious diversity in South Africa and the world.

Religious Education: A form of education that is orientated towards instruction within a particular faith, with the aim of understanding and promoting commitment to that faith.

Religious Instruction: Instruction in a particular faith or belief, with a view to the inculcation of adherence to that faith or belief.

Religious Observances: Activities and behaviours which recognise and express the views, beliefs and commitments of a particular religion, and may include gatherings of adherents, prayer times, dress and diets.

Religious Studies: A subject which is being proposed for the Further Education and Training Band (Grades 10-12) in which learners undertake the study of religion and religions in general, with the possibility of specialisation in one or more of these in context.

Religious Change Principal: School principals expected to manage implementation of religion policy in schools.

ABSTRACT

It has been the desire of the ANC government ever since it came to power in 1994 to develop a unity of purpose and spirit that cherishes and celebrates the diverse nature of the South African population in terms of culture, language and religion and to transform existing inequalities that are deep-rooted in South African educational history and religion in particular. In order to satisfy this desire, a whole plethora of legislation and policies was developed. Amongst the developments entailed in these laws and policies were religious rights and freedoms guaranteed to all South Africans as well as the establishment of democratic structures vested with powers to govern schools while school principals manage them. In terms of education legislation, one of the functions of the governing body of a school is to develop and adopt a school policy on religion (as per the study) which is accordingly implemented by the school principal. It is in the policy implementation stage that the school principal is expected to play a mediating role and resolve possible conflicts erupting due to different religious interests.

This study is based on the assumption that the management and leadership training they received and the position they hold as school managers and leaders, enabled participating school principals to mediate the implementation of new religion policies. The research question driving this study was “How do school principals deal with implementation of the National Policy on Religion and Education in schools?” Informed by this question the focus of the study was to explore “how principals describe and experience their mediating role in implementing the religion policy within an existing religious context in schools”. Following a qualitative research approach a phenomenological research design was employed in order to understand and describe the meaning of the lived, felt and narrated experiences of school principals. Data were collected by means of narrative interviews where twelve school principals pursuing postgraduate studies with the University of Pretoria and who have been in education for at least ten years, told their religion in education stories. These stories were subsequently transcribed, analysed and interpreted to determine the impact of principals’ past religious experiences and their management training on their implementation of religion policies at their schools.

This study found that in dealing with the National Policy on Religion and Policy (2003) implementation in schools, participating principals ignore the policy in preference of maintaining the *status quo*. When faced with conflicts related to religious interests, they partially sub-contracted into the policy. They did not seem to consider transformative mediation as a possible leadership strategy for conflict resolution in the existing religious context of schools. The study also found that amongst these principals, there were those who displayed a confident attitude, values of openness, generosity and integrity and had used their past religious experiences to transform the quality of conflict interaction in schools. My recommendation in this regard would therefore be threefold. One, Higher Education Institutions should provide appropriate training by introducing suitable courses that will yield adequate knowledge, skills and opportunities for professional attitude, value attainment and determination for continuous learning and development to principals as key change agents. Two, there is a need for these organizations to re-evaluate and re-organise existing courses for better recognition of transformative mediation as a leadership strategy to conflict resolution in schools. The provincial departments of education need to provide appropriate training for prospective principals as part of professional development programmes to address the essential needs pertaining to policy implementation that could create conflict in schools. Training in mediation of conflict would therefore be essential.

KEYWORDS

Religion

Religion education

Religious observances

Religion policy

Conflict resolution

Mediation

Transformative mediation

Problem-solving mediation

Sub-contracting

Resistance to change

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION, RESEARCH PROBLEM AND METHOD

1.1 Introduction

Change is part of what it means to be human. We develop, change jobs, our social position, profession, or religion. In fact, from the moment we are born, our lives are changing. We do not, however, always embrace or welcome those changes. Sometimes we choose the changes we want to effect in our lives, but often change is necessitated by changes in our environment. It is these changes that challenge us to adapt or which results in our being left behind. School principals are not exempted from change and, in an era of transformation, as is experienced in South Africa over the past nineteen years, one may expect these changes to be frequent, radical and enduring. The problem lies not in the need to change or transform, but in how we deal with and mediate these changes in our lives and in the lives of others, in how we succeed in getting others to change with us or to resist the changes required.

In 1994, after the first democratic elections in South Africa, the new, African National Congress, government was faced with the challenge of rethinking and restructuring the education system of the previous era. Already in White Paper 1 on Education (DoE, 1995) the direction and the intensity of the change anticipated was outlined in the declaration that:

South Africa has never had a truly national system of education and training and it does not have one yet. This policy document describes the process of transformation in education and training which will bring into being a system serving all our people, our new democracy, and our Reconstruction and Development Programme.

Our message is that education and training must change. It cannot be business as usual in our schools, colleges, technikons and universities. The national project of reconstruction and development compels everyone in education and training to accept the challenge of creating a system which cultivates and liberates the talents of all our people without exception. (White Paper, 1995)

What followed was a comprehensive process aimed at changing existing education laws and policies to give effect to the proposed transformation outlined not only in the White Paper but also in subsequent legislation. Since 1995, a range of Acts and departmental policies – developed by the National Department of Education – were released, first for public comment and then for implementation. These Acts and policies covered the whole spectrum of education, from the curriculum and governance structures of schools to the level of National

Policy on Religion and Education in 2003. In all these policies the role of the school and, in particular, of the school principal has been foregrounded as crucial to the effective implementation of policies. This study is specifically focused on the implementation of the Religion in Education Policy (2003). The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, Act 108 of 1996, guarantees the right to religious freedom and religious diversity. It commits the State to the protection and promotion of individuals' and groups' religious rights, thereby affording people the freedom to follow their own religious orientations while simultaneously adhering to legislated constitutional principles (RSA, Act 108 of 1996). More specifically, the Constitution ensures freedom of conscience, religion, belief and opinion for every South African citizen (section, 15(1)). Further provision is made for religious observances to be conducted at State or State-aided institutions provided that a) they follow the rules laid down by the appropriate public authorities; b) they are conducted on an equitable basis, and c) attendance of such observances is free and voluntary (Section 15[2]). In stipulating these provisos, the State aims to balance individual rights with group rights.

The religious freedom guaranteed by the Constitution is reaffirmed in the South African Schools Act (Act 84 of 1996) and is further refined in specific policies and regulations. The same Act, however, also mandates the establishment of democratically elected school governing bodies, indicating the roles, functions and responsibilities they are to perform. In this study I argue that these legislative frameworks and policies may give rise to certain contestations which, in turn, could cause conflict in schools and among various stakeholders in the school. By implication, the school principal would be required to resolve the potential conflict. I base my argument on the plethora of policies developed subjected schools to a variety of changes and other internal and external influences simultaneously. Along with such changes were provisions that, first, the development of religious observation policies of the school is the role and responsibility of the School Governing Body (SGB). Second, such policies must be based on the value of equality and protect the right to freedom and choice of attendance of any religious observances. School principals are therefore at the heart of the implementation of these policies that demand a complete change of work environment and their roles, and executing this responsibility has not been easy for them.

In 2003, the National Policy on Religion and Education was released. This policy was meant to transform the single-faith approach to religious education — Christian Religious Education (education based on biblical teachings aimed at instilling in learners Christian beliefs and values) into a multi-tradition approach to Religion Education — education about diverse

religions for a diverse society. It is important to mention that, with current concerns about the general decline in moral standards, the high rate of crime, and the apparent lack of respect for human life in this country, the State seeks to realise the benefits of religion as an important human activity, something which all learners should know about if they are to be holistically educated. Indications are that Religion Education, when given its rightful place in the education system, creates opportunities for the imparting of moral values in the teaching of and learning of religious and other value systems (DoE, 2003).

In addition to the pressure placed on schools to implement the new religion in education policy are pressures brought about by the dissolution of apartheid barriers: classrooms are increasingly becoming spaces of linguistic, cultural, and religious diversity. Schools need to mediate between old and new systems, creating a social, intellectual, emotional, behavioural, organisational, and structural environment that reflects a sense of acceptance, security, and respect for people with different values, cultural backgrounds, and religious traditions. The School Governing Body is also expected to make available school facilities for religious observances on an equitable basis.

In terms of their mediating role, schools are expected to ensure that all learners, irrespective of race, creed, sexual orientation, disability, language, gender, or class, feel welcome, emotionally secure, and appreciated at all times. Applied to Religion Education this means that teaching about religious and secular values should occur in an open educational environment. By implication, schools should distinguish between Religion Education and Religious Instruction, the former being acceptable as a school subject, the latter not. Religion education should teach children about the different religions in South Africa and the world; religious instruction, which focuses on a specific religion, should be the responsibility of parents and/or religious institutions and organisations.

Considering the fact that religion policy implementation needs to be facilitated by trained and registered personnel, provision is made to support and enable schools to mediate such policy implementation in schools. Regarding the teaching of Religion Education, educators have access to relevant textbooks, supplementary materials, guidelines for teaching methods, and learner assessment procedures and mechanisms. In-service training is also offered through religious organisations and other agencies in order to build and sustain educators' professional competence and recognition as teachers in the subject and to encourage them to distinguish between teaching and preaching (DoE, 2003).

The training challenge was also taken further to Higher Education Institutions to ensure the provision of appropriate teacher education in the study of religion and religions as part of teacher education programmes. With regard to professional training, programmes such as the Advanced Certificate in Education (ACE) Leadership, B.Ed (Hons), Master's and Doctoral degree programmes in education are offered to school managers. Training tends to be generic, focusing on aspects such as management theory, financial administration, education law, education policy and human resource management and could include training on aspects such as conflict management. What is not included in management training is the analysis of specific policies, such as the religion-in-education policy, because it is assumed that university graduates would be able to apply generic management theory and principles to the analysis and implementation of particular policies.

When I look at the introduction of the new religion-in-education policy in the South African education system (2003) I ask myself, 'How did school principals deal with the implementation? Did they mediate implementation, trying to reconcile and accommodate divergent views as expected by government and those offering professional training, or did they simply implement what was handed down to them?

Since very little is known about the mediating strategies used by school principals to achieve transformation and / or change within an existing religious context of schools, this study is aimed at gaining greater clarity on the matter by investigating the ways in which principals describe and experience the implementation of the policy.

1.2 Statement of the problem

The South African Schools Act (84 of 1996: Section 7) clearly states that "subject to the Constitution and any applicable provincial law, religious observances may be conducted at a public school under rules issued by the governing body if such observances are conducted on an equitable basis and attendance at them by learners and members of staff is free and voluntary". The National Policy on Religion in Education (par. 58 & par. 21) also specifies that in accordance with the Constitution, the South African Schools Act (SASA), and rules drawn up by the appropriate authorities, the governing bodies of public schools may make their facilities available for religious observances, in the context of free and voluntary association, provided that facilities are made available on an equitable basis (DoE, 2003).

The policy further stipulates that school governing bodies (SGBs) are required to determine the nature and content of religious observances for teachers and learners, and that religious observances may be part of a school assembly, provided that, if such observances become an official part of the day, they must be conducted on equitable basis.

Based on the assumption that the leadership and management theories that school principals studied during teacher training and subsequent professional development programmes have sufficiently equipped them with the ability to manage and lead their schools according to the rules determined by the school governing body (SGB), school principals are tasked with the strategic implementation of the religion policy and its procedures. Some school governing bodies do not, however, agree with the direction that the department of education is taking as far as the religion-in-education policy is concerned; neither do they feel obliged to abide by it (Clarke, 2007; Bacharach & Mundell, 1993) since they regard the policy as an attempt by the department to convert their children to these other religions. The school principal, accountable to both parties - the department and school governing body - finds himself caught in the middle: one of the parties (the department) has the power to dismiss him and the other is in a position to undermine his authority and make his life miserable (Clarke, 2007).

It is important to point out that, when the National Policy on Religion and Education (2003) is read in conjunction with other directives given to schools, school principals are not only required to implement this new policy aimed at transformation, but also to assume new professional roles in its implementation, this even though they had no say in whether such a policy was necessary or in how it should be formulated. Consequently school principals are caught in the grip of change, trying to cope, perform, and lead the transformation of their schools without a clear understanding of their ultimate role in a newly emerging process (Alexander, 1992). Trapped in a chasm between departmental and school level change (Rowley, 1992), they find themselves having to negotiate their way between a range of often opposing players participating in the change process, and having to deal with too many change factors at the same time (Alexander, 1992). These demands have caused considerable role conflict for principals and have led to their experiencing a high degree of anxiety and uncertainty about their mediating role in the change process (Alexander, 1992).

The potential or actual conflict arising from the role of principals is that a school principal is an influential member of the SGB on whose advice and guidance other members depend. As such, one would be influential in determining the nature of the school's policies from the

Department of Education. On the other hand, the principal implements policies determined by the SGB or from the department according to his/her interpretation and that of the SGB and/or Department. A principal can therefore be perceived by other stakeholder as the source or cause of the conflict arising from policy implementation. The irony is that it is the very conflict that principals are supposed to mediate.

1.2.1 Research Purpose

The purpose of this study is to first explore and then describe participating principals' experience of the role they played as mediators in the implementation of the National Policy on Religion and Education (2003) within the religion context of schools at the time. Informing this purpose is the assumption that their pre- and in-service training equipped school principals with the requisite theoretical knowledge and insight to deal with circumstances such as the one under discussion. The aim of the study was therefore to gain greater understanding of how school principals mediate these complex situations. I thought that it was possible that the experiences of principals might reveal different trajectories along which these processes unfolded and that, in documenting these, I might gain greater insight into the management challenges of principals on the one hand and on their ability to provide leadership on the other.

1.2.2 Research question

From informal discussions I had with a number of school principals, it became clear that they have managed the implementation of religion policy in different ways and that they have met with opposition from various stakeholder groupings in their attempts to carry out their mandate. These discussions also reaffirmed the sensitive nature of religion in schools. What became clear from principals' stories is that they experienced the religion policy in schools and the expectations of their stakeholders as complex. Also, so it would appear from my review of literature (see Chapter 2), very little, if any, research has been done on this phenomenon.

It is in the light of the above-mentioned situation that this study seems necessary. In particular, its purpose is to seek answers to the following research question: "How do school principals deal with the implementation of the National Policy on Religion and Education at schools?"

Underpinning this overarching question is the need to establish whether school principals mediate the implementation of a new policy with their stakeholder groupings or whether they simply “sub-contract” and implement policy as directed by the department of education.

1.2.3 Critical questions

The following questions were formulated (see Chapter 3) to assist me in answering the main research question:

- What are school principals’ experiences with religion in schools?
- How do these experiences shape their thinking about religion in schools?
- In implementing the National Policy on Religion and Education, what role did the school principal play in the religious observance policy crafted by the SGB?
- What role did other stakeholders (e.g. educators, parents, learners) play in the crafting of the religious observance policy?
- What education management strategies did the principals employ to craft a religious policy of schools?
- How does the principal deal with the contesting views of these groups as regards religion in schools?

1.3 Sub-contracting versus mediation

As school manager, a school principal is responsible for the day-to-day running of the school and for ensuring that the school functions according to the policies and procedures established by the State and the school governing body. It is therefore expected of a school principal to guide and assist the SGB in crafting all policies assigned to the SGB. These policies, whether language, admission or religion, must be developed within a potentially polarized situation, where various stakeholder groupings may want to influence the process and outcome. The policies cannot and may not be developed in a lacuna; they must be framed within the requirements of the Constitution, existing legislation and with due attention to other policies or expectations of the Department of Education and other interest groups. The danger as far as the management of a school is concerned is that school principals may, in an attempt to satisfy departmental instructions, simply implement what they perceive as directives without consulting or mediating the implementation of the policy with their stakeholder groupings — i.e. “sub-contracting” to departmental demands. The counter-argument may also hold, where they ignore departmental directives for the sake of

stakeholder interests, thus “sub-contracting” to stakeholder demands. For schools to be effective, school managers need to appreciate the potential divergence of interests and mediate policy implementation in such a way that all stakeholder groupings are included while ensuring that departmental expectations are met.

Today’s school principals are caught between two imperatives for change, namely internal imperatives – a complex mixture of school-based factors (i.e. the level of staff competence and motivation, the school culture and climate, the current level of students’ achievement, and leadership approaches of the principal as they try to establish a particular vision, value framework or school ethos), and external imperatives (i.e. imposed change by the government) (Day, Sammons, Stobart, Kington & Gu, 2007). A principal may decide to become either the “sub-contractor” – acknowledging loss of control, autonomy and decision making because key decisions are made elsewhere (by the department and / or the SGB) – or to become the “mediator” – creating or using what space he has to integrate the externally imposed change. A detailed discussion of these two concepts can be found in Chapter 2.

When a new religion policy is introduced that emotionally and morally challenges deeply held convictions and beliefs in a school, it gives rise to conflict. Conflict situations require mediation if they are to be resolved, and the primary goal of all stakeholder groupings involved should be to solve the change-related problem. Disputants must fight the temptation to turn aside blame and assign it to the other party. They should focus on the future and on how best to improve performance. An important secondary goal should be to re-establish civil, constructive communication between stakeholder groupings. The bitter feelings commonly associated with conflict often stop communication flow, working as it does, through indirect channels (e.g., gossip) or confrontations. Mediators need to get stakeholder groupings to discuss change issues in a constructive manner. A third goal of mediation should be to restore harmony and rebuild trust in the relationship. Effective mediation can be very empowering for employees, and it can help them develop stronger relationships and better conflict management skills. It follows that managerial mediation is well worth the time invested in it. Mediators bring parties together (or sometimes shuttle between them), help them describe the problem in terms of negotiable interests and needs rather than non-negotiable positions, and develop a set of ideas on how the interests and needs of both sides could be met simultaneously.

Literature about mediating processes in the area of transformational leadership and organisational performance (Lee, Gillespie, Mann & Wearing, 2010; Boerner, Eisenbeiss & Griesser, 2007; Piccolo & Colquitt, 2006; Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Moorman & Fetter, 1990) is beginning to emerge. However, since most of the studies are conducted outside the education domain, their focus is primarily on issues dealing with followers' trust in leaders, agreement on values, job satisfaction, followers' intrinsic motivation and beliefs, and group cohesion. In my review of literature on the topic only four studies (Tam, 2010; Harris, 2006; Day, 2005; Day, Harris & Hatfield, 1999) investigated mediation as a leadership strategy in challenging school circumstances where leaders were fully engaged as transformative mediators. These studies appear to be partially similar to my study.

The variables that the above studies share with the current study – my study – are that they are school-based, focus primarily on mediation as a leadership strategy, and use school principals who have been operating in challenging situations that generated a number of tensions and dilemmas as the target group. Day *et al* (1999) explored the characteristics that UK school principals exhibited as well as the tensions and dilemmas they experienced with the implementation of new, externally imposed, policy initiatives. The only difference between my study and that of Day and associates is that teachers, parents, governors and students were part of their study whereas only principals were part of mine. Other studies related but not similar to mine were conducted by Tam (2010), Harris (2006) and Day (2005). Tam (2010) case studied one head of department in a particular school in Hong Kong, Harris (2006) investigated British schools that faced acute levels of socio-economic deprivation, and Day (2005) explored situations where schools in the UK were experiencing an unprecedented numbers of government imposed changes in the quest to raise standards and increase accountability.

Besides the fact that my study was conducted in South Africa, not in Europe or Asia, it differs from those of other researchers for the fact that it adds to existing knowledge on the way in which school principals' experience and describe mediating processes related to religious matters in schools. This said, I also consider it worthwhile to indicate the relevance and actuality of the same study in the section that follows.

1.4 Relevance and actuality of the study

According to Chizelu (2006), education research is regarded as relevant and actual when it adds some value to education. By implication the description of the research problem and proposed solutions should contribute to the theory and practice of education both in the present and in the future. The actuality and relevance of the current study is therefore presented below.

Considering the fact that South Africa as a country is becoming more multi-religious due to displacement, refugee movements and migration of people resulting from political, economic and / or religious issues, the South African government saw a need to acknowledge and celebrate religious diversity by taking steps to ensure and protect the equal religious rights of all citizens. This need, as indicated in the previous sections, gave birth to a plethora of policies, including the national religion-in-education policy. Notwithstanding these initiatives, indications are that many schools continued to adopt single-faith approaches in which religious instruction is provided in one religion only. Several factors may be contributing to this behaviour, one of which may be a lack of empathy in education towards other religions. According to Chizelu (2006), such empathy does not only require the school manager to decrease his commitment to his own religious faith, but also to tolerate other religions. Civic tolerance of religions other than one's own does not mean acceptance of all religions being the same; rather, it implies that all religions have equal rights to existence in the country (Chizelu, 2006). The actuality of the study therefore lies in the need for greater knowledge of and tolerance for diversity – also religious diversity.

In this regard it is important to mention that the implementation of educational policies in the South African transformational era has not been a smooth road for the majority of school principals. This claim is best supported by evidence of the alarming number of court cases and reports by parents who are not satisfied with the way in which schools are being governed and managed (see Chapter 3). The relevance of this study therefore lies in the need for school leaders to be knowledgeable about and skilled in conflict mediation.

Finally, I, as the researcher, expect that the interests of educationists, scholars, and academics will be aroused by my research, and that it will raise questions regarding religion in education as well as in mediation as a leadership strategy that could be used to resolve conflict in multi-faith contexts in South Africa and elsewhere worldwide.

The study is therefore open to further examination by those concerned with and about education, the use of mediation in education contexts, and / or in the teaching and learning of religion and religions in school contexts.

In view of the points made above this study could therefore be regarded as both relevant and actual. On the one hand its findings could assist relevant parties (i.e. schools, provincial authorities, learning area committees, Higher Education Institutions, religious bodies and researchers in religion education, both locally and internationally) to more effectively deal with religion in education from a multi-faith educational perspective. On the other hand it could encourage parties concerned to seriously consider mediation as a leadership strategy in the resolution of conflicts in education in particular.

I therefore argue that this is an original study with a unique focus. I base my claim on the following facts: one, given the history of this country and religious education in apartheid South Africa the introduction of religious freedom in terms of religious practices in schools with learners and staff from diverse cultures and religions (Abdool & Drinkwater, 2005) calls for a genuinely sustainable and universal management strategy, one which is to be explored in this study. Also, principals in this study are captives of history in two ways.

Firstly, principals, and the schools in which they are based, are products of history (past events) and, like any human being, they use history (an interpretation of past events) when they make choices about the present and future (Naidoo, 2005). It is possible, therefore, that their past experiences may in some significant way influence the manner in which these principals approach policy implementation. In particular, their past experiences with religion in education might impact on their implementation of the new religion policy, irrespective of any theoretical knowledge and insights they acquired during their pre-service training and subsequent professional development courses.

Secondly, religion is a sensitive and complicated issue by nature, let alone when it has to be dealt with in complex organisations like schools. Its complexity is best explained by the fact that while the rest of the education sector had undergone substantial changes by 1996, the matter of religion in education was held in abeyance until 2003 (Van der Walt, 2011). Schools are, moreover, complex organizations in the sense that they are peopled with stakeholder groupings with diverse religions, representing different age groups, and with different levels of understanding. It is this situation which, at the moment, results in various power struggles: individuals and / or religious leaders, for example, feel that the government

wants to possess their schools, thereby threatening their religious membership, their greatest fear and worry being that conversion is going to take place on a massive scale. As history and research have shown, religion could be a strong unifying factor (Teece, 2010) but it could also be the most divisive of forces (Barnes, 2005). One way or the other, we have witnessed the most horrific wars fought in the name of religion worldwide (Abdool, Potgieter, Van der Walt & Wolhuter, 2007; Dreyer, Pieterse & Van Der Ven, 2002). We are also aware that religion played a significant role in this country in the sense that it has, on one hand, been misused to divide and oppress and, on the other, to serve as inspiration towards liberation (Mkhatshwa, 1998).

Thirdly, given its unique curriculum, the South African government has requested Higher Education Institutions to align their teacher education programmes to the national educational goals. This study is therefore informed by the assumption that school principals are well equipped with the necessary knowledge, skills, values and attitudes for the effective implementation of the religion policy in schools.

The reasons provided above confirm the originality of this study. My purpose to explore how school principals interpret and understand their mediating role in religion policy implementation within an existing religious context in schools is therefore unique and could add to existing scientific knowledge. In order to reach this aim, I opted for the research design and methodology described in the section that follows.

1.5 Research design

In this study the term, ‘research design’ is used to refer to the programme that guided me as the researcher in the collection, analysis and interpretation of data in order to find answers to my original research questions. The research approach I chose, and in which the current study is rooted, is qualitative rather than quantitative in nature. The adoption of a qualitative approach allowed me to adopt a phenomenological research design. Both the qualitative approach and the phenomenological research design are discussed in the sub-sections that follow.

1.5.1 Qualitative approach

Having opted for qualitative research I have to first describe what the goal and main features of qualitative research are and then indicate how my own investigation reflects or differs from qualitative approaches in general. That is the purpose of this section.

The qualitative approach to research is said to be a form of scientific research in which the researcher (1) seeks answers to a research question; (2) systematically uses a predefined set of procedures to answer the research question; (3) collects evidence by means of interviews, observations, and / or document analysis, and (4) produces findings that were not determined in advance, and which are applicable beyond the immediate boundaries of the phenomenon under investigation (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010; Lichtman, 2010; Slavin, 2007; Hollway & Jefferson, 2000). Patton (2001) and Hoepfl (1997) define qualitative research as any kind of research that produces findings not arrived at by means of statistical procedures or other means of quantification; instead, findings emerge from real-world settings where the phenomenon under study unfolds naturally.

The goal of qualitative research is to explore and understand a central phenomenon (Nieuwenhuis, 2007), hence qualitative investigations focus on the experiences of participants as they are lived, felt and narrated (Sherman & Webb, 1988). The use of a qualitative approach provided me with complex textual descriptions of how school principals experienced different religion policies and help me to uncover the way(s) in which their experience influenced their thoughts, actions, and choice of management strategies when implementing these policies in their schools. With its track record of effectively identifying intangible factors such as social norms, socioeconomic status, gender role, ethnicity, and religion in particular – much of which is not readily apparent – qualitative research seemed most likely to provide me with information on the often contradictory behaviours, beliefs, opinions, emotions, and relationships of stakeholder groupings involved (Golafshani, 2003).

In adopting a qualitative research approach I became the key research instrument, thus the processes of data gathering, data analysis, interpretation and reporting were my responsibility. In accepting this responsibility I ensured that I would have multiple opportunities to interact with school principals and that my use of narration-schema procedures would give principals the liberty to narrate their experiences in their own words (Bates, 2004; Riessman, 1993). In addition, the use of a qualitative research approach afforded me the opportunity of establishing mutual relationships with school principals in a less formal way, thereby creating an atmosphere that enabled them to narrate their experiences in a more elaborate and detailed manner. At the same time, I had the opportunity to note down follow-up questions (probing) which I could ask in various stages during the interview – when they paused or signalled the end of the narration, for example (Wolcott, 2001).

The combination of narrative schema and probing would, I hoped, evoke responses that were a) meaningful and culturally salient to school principals; b) unanticipated by me as the researcher, and c) rich and explanatory in nature.

Lastly, when analysing the collected data, qualitative research allowed me to move back and forth between collected and analysed data as and when I interpreted it. Instead of seeking casual determination, prediction, and generalisation of findings as is the case in quantitative research, I used qualitative research to illuminate, understand, and extrapolate what I found and learnt to other, similar, situations (Hoepfl, 1997). Finally, qualitative research provided me with the opportunity to report findings in a more interpretative manner as I attempted to understand and portray the lives and experiences of school principals in their own words. By so doing, I was able to present my research findings from participating principals' perspectives (Johnson & Christensen, 2012; McMillan & Schumacher, 2010) rather than from my own.

1.5.2 Phenomenological research design

The phenomenological research design, as used in my study, represents an approach in which the lived, felt and narrated experiences of individuals are studied. These experiences are relayed in the form of narratives that are analysed and interpreted in order to draw conclusions about the phenomenon being investigated.

The phenomenon being investigated in this study is the way in which school principals experience their mediating role during the implementation of religion policies in schools. Being concerned with principals' lived experiences, I sought to uncover the hidden in principals' narratives of how they experienced, or felt about, their role as mediators during the implementation of religion policy at their own schools.

I chose the phenomenological approach since it seemed most likely to provide me with the kind of in-depth description of lived experiences I needed to understand the phenomenon being investigated (Cilesiz, 2008). Reasons for this preference are noted below.

Firstly, a phenomenological approach would allow me to describe experiences, as lived by participating principals, with great awareness of my preconceptions or learned feelings about the phenomenon, their potential role in research and an attempt to control them so that they do not play an inordinate role in research (Sharma-Brymer & Fox, 2008).

Secondly, I accepted as a premise that a phenomenological approach lends itself to the acquisition of double insight: first, human experience is intelligible – it makes sense to those who live it – prior to all interpretation and theorizing; second, the sense or logic of human experience is an inherent structural property of the experience itself, not something constructed by an outside observer. Put differently, human experience is meaningful to those who live it, and its meaning is there to be “seen” – or grasped – directly. In using a phenomenological approach I would therefore be able not only to uncover the inherent logic of principals’ experiences but also to articulate it faithfully and without distortion (Dukes, 1984).

Fourthly, the phenomenological approach would allow me to identify / determine school principals’ experience of different religion policies and of the way in which they dealt with the implementation of one or more of these (Moustakas, 1994) – that is, I would obtain direct descriptions of their experiences without considering their cause or attempting to ascertain their agreement or not with an independent reality (Østergaard, Dahlin & Hugo, 2008).

Lastly, phenomenology does not allow for empirical generalization, the establishment of functional relationships, or the development of theory with which to predict or control; instead, it offered me the possibility of developing plausible insights that would bring me, as the researcher, in more direct contact with the world of the researched (Cilesiz, 2008). In other words, it enabled me to see the world through the eyes of the school principals who participated in my study, thereby giving me an understanding of how they construct their reality.

1.6 Research method

In the current study, research method is regarded as the tools used to gather relevant information about the phenomenon under study. These include not only the sampling techniques and the sample I would use to participate in the study but also the devices I would use to collect and analyse data collected during the course of my investigation.

1.6.1 Sampling

Sampling is defined as a process aimed at the selection of a group of participants for a study (Johnson & Christensen, 2012; Nieuwenhuis, 2007; Slavin, 2007). Although the majority of South African school principals would qualify for participation in this study it was not possible to include all of them. I therefore purposefully selected principals who were

postgraduate students at the University of Pretoria. Informing this choice was my assumption that principals who were also postgraduate students [i.e. students enrolled in BEd (Hons), Master's and / or Doctoral programmes) in the field of education management and leadership would have acquired the appropriate knowledge, skills, values and attitudes to be able to successfully mediate the implementation of policies such as those on religion in schools.

To further validate my choice of research participants I included only those postgraduate students who had at least ten years of experience as educators and / or principals in the new South Africa. Informing my decision was the assumption that the longer they have been in the profession, the more certain I could be that they have experienced the implementation of different religion policies and that they are currently leading religious change in their schools. By implication they would be people with rich experiences, who could share their own lived experiences by telling us how the religion policy was dealt with during their childhood and their lives as young educators — post 1994 and post 2003, and how they started implementing religion policies and / or policy directives in their schools in their role as principals.

Twelve BEd (Hons), Masters' and Doctorate students at the University of Pretoria, who were school principals at the time I undertook this study, and who were willing to participate, were invited to do so. The reasons I chose students from this university in particular were pragmatic. Firstly, they would be easily accessible as and when they were on campus for meetings with their supervisors or when they attended research support sessions. Secondly, since they were studying towards a post-graduate degree they should be *au fait* with general management theory. Thirdly, being school principals in schools from across the country their leadership backgrounds and experiences would be very different from one another's. Also, as students, they would be participating in their private capacity, not as spokespersons for specific schools.

Having identified the sample, I contacted school principals to gain permission to engage them in the study. Permission having been granted I made individual appointments with all those who indicated their willingness to participate in accordance with their availability on campus.

1.6.2 Data collection

Relevant literature was reviewed to gather information on what different researchers say about strategies to be employed in challenging circumstances such as those faced by South African school principals since this study was aimed at exploring how principals deal with this challenge. Informed by the above purpose as well as by my intent to study the experiences of people (Clandinin, Murthy, Huber & Orr, 2010) as lived, told and narrated (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Craig, 2010), narrative inquiry was regarded as the most suitable mode of inquiry since it would enable me, as a researcher, to enter the private and sensitive lives of school principals (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

In accordance with African¹ tradition, each inquiry commenced with the usual social graces – asking about the participant’s general wellbeing, the family and his / her studies. This was done merely to establish a sense of trust, but was not included as data. Having followed these rules of etiquette I highlighted the purpose of my study and explained the key areas to be studied in the inquiry process (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), namely their experiences of different religion policies during their own childhood (while they were of a school going age), their early days as young educators – the period prior to 1994 – and their experiences as principals, after 1994, when the Constitution and SASA brought about the need for religious change. I indicated that my key interest was in their experiences after 2003 when they, as principals, were faced with the role of implementing the new religion-in-education policy.

I conducted altogether twelve narrative interviews over a period of six months, commencing in April 2012. My reflection on participating principals’ narratives encompassed what Hendry (2010) describes as the three major spheres of inquiry, namely the scientific (physical), the symbolic (human experience), and the sacred (metaphysical). I therefore had to recap their past experiences by matching a verbal sequence to the sequence of events which actually occurred (Pentland, 1999).

Follow-up questions provided me with a deeper sense of how school principals experienced the particularity, ambiguity and complexity of the task they were faced with. To assist me in understanding their practical knowledge I utilised a range of epistemologies, methodologies, and different modes to represent their mediation process, their thinking about it, and the ways in which they made meaning of these (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Lyons, 2010). In this

¹ Africa in terms of the continent in which all participants belonged at the time of the interviews regardless of their nationalities

regard the use of narrative inquiry provided me with an epistemology and methodology for storying school principals' experiences of and practices in religion policy implementation in terms of their knowledge of religion policies, troubles, conceptions of knowledge, and of what would count as knowledge production (Atkinson, 2010). Each interview was meant to last for at least 30 to 45 minutes but, depending on how comprehensive participants wanted to be, provision was made for differences in the length of interviews. All the interviews were audio-taped with the permission of the school principals and were transcribed verbatim afterwards.

1.6.3 Data analysis

Participating principals' stories, which represent raw data, were analysed, compared and interpreted against the background of the research problem stated earlier.

Principals' transcribed narratives were individually analysed in accordance with pre-determined categories (Sharma-Brymer & Fox, 2008). These included principals' past and present religious experiences (positive and negative) as well as the education management strategies they employed in dealing with religion-in-education policy implementation. I coded principals' descriptions to determine differences and similarities between the codes with a view to identifying possible patterns (Nieuwenhuis, 2007). I then grouped together the related patterns of categories which I expected would give rise to specific themes. Finally, I compared the emerging themes with insights I gained from literature (presented in Chapter 2) on resistance to change, mediation and sub-contracting.

1.7 Limitations

In setting out the criteria, it was never the intention to get a representative sample of school principals, but to select participants based on the criteria set for inclusion in the research. For the purpose of this study the six important criteria used in the sampling of participants resulted in certain limitations to the research. The first of these was that, in accordance with qualitative research principles, it was important to purposefully sample participants, school principals in my case, who had experience of the religion in education policies prior to and after 1994. Selected principals were therefore typically more mature and middle-aged. Secondly, they had to be post-graduate students in education management and would thus have been exposed to training in conflict and conflict resolution.

The third limitation of the study was the fact that all of the participants were students from the University of Pretoria and thus predominantly from a specific region. Fourth, the sample was drawn only from the north of the country, the case which could limit the findings. Fifth, since more than 70% of people in South Africa belong to the Christian faith, it was expected that Christians would possibly also dominate the sample group. Lastly, but not the least, my position as a foreign student with insufficient time and resources could not allow me enough time in the field to really get to know participants or to spend time in their work settings.

1.8 Conclusion

This study was conducted in three stages. The first consisted of an extensive review of literature, resulting in two chapters which focus on an analysis of the topic. The purpose of the analysis was to formulate theoretical conclusions on mediation as a leadership strategy for conflict resolution in schools but also to gain a better understanding of the challenges faced not only by the new RSA in its attempts to transform education but also by school managers who are responsible for implementing new religion-in-education policy. The second stage was primarily concerned with data collection. Twelve school principals who had been in education for at least ten years, who had experienced the changes in religion policy and who were postgraduate students at the University of Pretoria, were purposefully selected as research participants. The final stage involved data analysis, resulting in the structuring of research findings, with principals' narratives serving as a means of bringing together the data, research problem and theoretical framework. My research report, i.e. the report of my study, comprises six chapters, each focusing on a particular aspect or area of inquiry.

Chapter 1 — Introduction, research problem and method

Chapter 1 serves as an orientation to the study. Its primary purpose is to describe the research procedures followed, give the background to the study, indicate the purpose of the study, formulate the research problem which gave birth to the research question and critical questions, and state the research aim and objectives. The chapter also includes a theoretical analysis of aspects applicable to this study. Finally, the research structure is outlined to orient the reader to chapters that follow.

Chapter 2 — Mediation as an education management function to resolve conflicts in schools

This chapter provides an *analysis of mediation as an education management construct in order to understand how effective managers deal with friction or conflict as a positive force*. It also provides an overview of educational change in the South African context, focusing specifically on the democratisation of school governance and the devolution of certain governance powers to school level while, simultaneously, retaining a large degree of authority at national level in terms of policy development and the creation of regulatory frameworks. It further maps, at theoretical level, the different trajectories of change management so that mediation as a function becomes more evident.

Chapter 3 — The changing policy landscape in South Africa: challenges in managing education transformation

Chapter 3 discusses the challenges faced by the South African government to transform education from being Christian National Education, which has been practiced for ages, into education which acknowledges religious diversity as well as the challenges faced by school management in the implementation of proposed reforms to religion in education. It gives a brief historical overview of religion in South African education, focusing specifically on policy options and strategies since 1994 which led to the development of the current religion in education policy in South Africa. Relevant legislation (SA Constitution, South African Schools Act [SASA], and the National Policy on Religion and Education) is reviewed in order to identify its contribution to the development of religion policy but also to critically analyse contradictions and contestations in this regard.

Chapter 4 — Research design and method

In this chapter I present the qualitative framework used in this study to learn more about principals' experiences, perceptions thoughts, feelings, choices and actions. Not only do I present the design of the study and the research paradigm in which it is framed but I also provide an overview of my data gathering, sampling and analysis procedures. In concluding the chapter I outline what I did to ensure that ethical considerations would not at any stage be ignored in the course of my study.

Chapter 5 — Research findings

The aim of the fifth chapter is to present my analysis of principals' narratives, focusing on their engagement with the social world and the ways in which they interpret their role as

managers of change. The analysis, done in terms of pre-determined identified categories, started with the coding of principals' descriptions – a process aimed at establishing differences and similarities between the codes. This done, my focus shifted to the identification of emerging patterns, the grouping of related patterns into categories, and the development of themes which lent themselves to the answering of my research questions.

Chapter 6 — Conclusions and recommendations

In Chapter 6 I present the insights gained from my study — my findings — indicating how these support the argument presented in this, my research report. In this chapter I unravel the bits of information discussed in other parts of the study and present inferences drawn from insights gained during the inquiry. These inferences, in turn, form the basis of the conclusions I reach about participating principals' experiences of mediation and the impact that their post-graduate training had on the ways in which they mediated the implementation of changes to religion-in-education policies. I further indicate what, according to me, the significance of the study is, comment on the implications of the findings, make recommendations on the implementation of policies that might create conflict in schools and conclude with suggestions regarding further research possibilities.

CHAPTER 2

MEDIATION AS AN EDUCATION MANAGEMENT FUNCTION

2.1 Introduction

Saul Alinsky (1971) argued that “Change means movement. Movement means friction. Only in the frictionless vacuum of a non-existent abstract world can movement or change occur without that abrasive friction or conflict”. In this study I shall argue, as indicated in Chapter 1, that the way to deal with friction or conflict is through mediation. To this purpose I shall analyse mediation as an education management construct in order to enhance my insight into the ways that effective managers utilize friction or conflict as a positive force.

In order to contextualise my argument I shall first give an overview of educational change in South Africa. I shall focus primarily on government efforts to democratise school governance. These efforts involved, amongst others, devolving certain governance powers to school level while retaining a large degree of authority at national level, specifically in the areas of policy development and the creation of regulatory frameworks. The danger is that policy developed at national level may result in what Jansen (2002) termed “policy symbolism”. Based on the theoretical construct I presented in Chapter 1, a construct that distinguishes between mediation and sub-contracting, I charted a theoretical map of the different trajectories of change management that allows mediation as an education management function to become more evident. More specifically, I discuss in this chapter sub-contracting and mediation as ways of dealing with the dilemmas school principals face when they find themselves caught between two sets of change imperatives: heeding to the demands and expectations of government and conforming to the governance wishes of educators or parents.

2.2 Educational change in South Africa

Economists moot that educational development leads to accelerated economic growth, an increase in wealth and income distribution, greater equality of opportunity and availability of skilled human power, a decline in population growth, long life, better health, lower crime rates, national unity and political stability (Ojiambo, 2009; Olaniyan & Okemakinder, 2008). Informed by this argument, many individuals and nations worldwide have increased their investment in education (Ojiambo, 2009).

South Africa is no exception. Since 1994 educational expenditure has increased substantially, with more than 20% of the national budget currently being allocated to education, not only to accrue possible economic benefits but also as a means of politically redressing past inequalities and reconstructing the education system. The changes brought about by the April 1994 elections in South Africa resulted in the kind of shift from authoritarian to democratic rule that has also occurred in many other countries. Since 1996, for example, every South African's personal and group rights have been protected by the Constitution (Act No.108 of 1996), the supreme law of the country. The Constitution guarantees not only the protection of language, religious, cultural, and education rights but also accords individuals and groups numerous liberties and freedoms, including freedom of expression. To ensure that these rights and freedoms would be protected and promoted by the State a range of Acts and policies have also been developed.

With regard to education, the White Paper on Education and Training (DoE, 1995) formulated a number of goals aimed at simultaneously addressing the injustices of the past and rectifying existing inequalities within the education system. It is this 1995 White Paper which served as basis for the rewriting and/or redrafting of education legislation and policies that would ensure equal education of the same quality for all South Africans in future (Naidoo, 2005). Of primary importance amongst the Acts passed was the South African Schools Act of 1996 (Act No. 84 of 1996), which focuses specifically on issues of redress, equality, quality and democratic participation. It is this Act which legislates, amongst others, the creation of a new school governance system, one which is intended to democratize school education by localising decision-making – devolving power to the individual school and community - and promoting the forming of citizen / community and State partnerships (RSA, 1996). Informing the creation of a devolved governance system is the intention to give substance to the principles of equity, redress, democratic governance and national development. As is categorically stated in the 1996 South African Schools Act (Act No. 84 of 1996)

the country requires a new national system for schools which will redress past injustices in educational provision, provide an education of progressively high quality for all learners and in so doing lay a strong foundation for the development of all South Africans' talents and capacities, advance the democratic transformation of society, combat racism and sexism and all forms of unfair discrimination and intolerance, promote an advance the diverse cultures and languages, uphold the rights of all learners, parents and educators, and promote their acceptance of responsibility for the organisation, governance and funding of schools in partnership with the state (Preamble: SASA, Act 84 of 1996).

In essence, therefore, the intention with SASA was to create an enabling context for school based management of education (Gamage, 1996a). Imperative to such devolution is the election of School Governing Bodies (SGBs) by parents, staff and learners (in secondary schools) on the one hand and allowing schools and their surrounding communities to democratically decide on matters concerning their school (RSA, 1996). These matters include:

- Subject to this Act and any applicable provincial law, the admission policy of a public school is determined by the governing body of such school (Section 5[5])
- The governing body of a public school may determine the language policy of the school subject to the Constitution, this Act and any applicable provincial law (Section 6[2])
- Subject to the Constitution and any applicable provincial law, religious observances may be conducted at a public school under rules issued by the governing body if such observances are conducted on an equitable basis and attendance by learners and members of staff is free and voluntary (Section 7).
- Subject to any applicable provincial law, a governing body of a public school must adopt a code of conduct for the learners after consultation with the learners, parents and educators of the school (Section 8[1]).

It is important to note the stipulation, next to each school-based policy mentioned above, that it should be developed in line not only with the Constitution but also with any other applicable provincial law. Even so the State then took it on itself to develop national policies and regulations on each of the aforementioned stipulations thereby creating the potential for tension between itself (the State) and the school governing body in terms of their respective policy development responsibilities and powers. In fact, there have already been numerous court cases in which the responsibilities of school governing bodies versus those of the State were contested (*cf. Minister of Education vs. Doreen Harris (CCT 13/01); Seodin Primary School and Others v MEC of Education, Northern Cape and Others 2006 (1) BCLR542 (NC); Middelburg Laerskool en die Skoolbeheerliggaam van Middelburg Laerskool v Departement, Departement van Onderwys, Mpumalanga 3003 (4) SA 160 (T); and Western Cape Minister of Education v the Governing Body of Mikro Primary school 2005 (3) SA 436 (SCA).*

As already indicated, the decision to establish SGBs in schools was informed by the need to democratize the education system, to promote the best interests of the school, and to ensure its development through the provision of quality education for all learners (RSA, 1996). In doing so, the State places the responsibility for school *governance* on the governing body (SGB). Responsibility for the professional *management* of schools, however, is still that of the school principal (Christie, 2010; Van Niekerk, Du & Van Niekerk, 2006). What this means is that the SGB of a school is responsible for the determination of its policies, for making recommendations on staff appointments and for its financial management, while the daily running of the school (professional management) resides with the principal and his School Management Team (SMT).

Indications from research are that placing educational resources, decision making, and responsibilities closer to the beneficiaries is one way of improving schools (World Bank, 2003). Reason given for this are that local communities know best what the needs of their children are, which incentives have the greatest impact on the performance of teachers and principals, and what advantages monitoring would have (Gamage, 2008; World Bank, 2007). Involving parents in school governance and/or in the monitoring and evaluation of activities, so it is claimed, is likely to increase transparency and accountability within the school. An increase in these areas, so the argument goes, has the potential to improve school effectiveness and quality. Also, the principal and the school would become more accountable to the local community, changing the school into a more open system, one that is more responsive to parents, more in touch with community concerns, and more inclined to develop closer, cooperative working relationships between staff, parents and students (World Bank, 2009, 2007; O'Neil, 1995).

The specific roles and responsibilities of the school principal and his² staff are spelled out in the Employment of Educators Act, 1998 (Act No. 76 of 1998) as well as in a number of related policies. The Employment of Educators Act, Section 3 (b), for example, states that the:

Head of Department shall be the employer of educators in the service of the provincial department of education in posts on the educator establishment of that department for all purposes of employment.

² For the sake of this study, the pronoun “he” or “his” will be used for the principal. This should not give the impression the position of principal is open only to males.

The principal and the school management team are thus employees of the Department of Education and not of the school governing body (unless they are educators employed by the school governing body in terms of relevant legislation). Consequently they are responsible to the State for the execution of their duties, including their duty to implement policies developed by the Department of Education.

The Personnel Administrative Measures (PAM) (DoE, 2003), in alignment with SASA (RSA, 1996), emphasise the need to empower educators and to improve the quality and efficiency of schooling which, so it is assumed, would thus result in higher learner achievement levels. Section 4 (4.1) of PAM clearly states that the

..., management of education should be able to draw on the professional competencies of educators, build a sense of unity and reinforce their belief that they can make a difference. When and where appropriate, authorities need to allocate authority and responsibility which will ensure the building of human resource capacity.

As part of his duties and responsibilities, according to PAM, Section 4.2, the school principal has to:

- Lead and manage his school
- Serve on recruitment, promotion, advisory and other committees as required
- Serve on the governing body of the school and render all necessary assistance in the performance of their functions in terms of the SA Schools Act, 1996
- Cooperate with staff and the school governing body in maintaining the efficient and smooth running of the school
- Cooperate with the school governing body with regard to all aspects specified in the SA Schools Act, 1996
- Participate in departmental and professional committees, seminars and courses in order to contribute to and/or update professional views/standards, and
- Liaise with the Circuits/Regional Office, Supplies Section, Personnel Section, and Finance Section concerning administration, staffing, accounting, purchase of equipment, research and updating of statistics in respect of educators and learners.

In analysing the tasks PAM assigns to the school principal the importance of cooperation with and support of the school governing body stands out. This emphasis is probably based on the assumption that such support and cooperation will ensure the efficient and smooth running of a school. Allied to this is the assumption that, should conflict occur between the State and the school governing body, the school principal would be able to handle it in a way that will not disrupt or compromise the smooth running of the school.

While it would seem as if SASA and related policies clearly divide the responsibilities of the SGB and the SMT, Naidoo (2005) argues that the concepts, *governance and management* are still unclear in terms of *who controls the schools* and *how schools are to be governed and managed*. Xaba (2004) echoes this argument, pointing to the occurrence of conflicts regarding not only parental powers but also the demarcation of governance and professional management roles and responsibilities in practice since SASA came into effect. Parents have, for example, demanded the right to hire and fire educators, contrary to the stipulations of the Education Labour Relations Act as well as the prescriptions for due process in disciplinary matters pertaining to educators (Kumalo, 2009). An example of this is cited by Bush and Heystek (2003) who discuss an instance where the SGB of a school suspended the principal. He was eventually reinstated, but only after a protracted battle.

To complicate matters even further, Section 16A (1) of the Education Laws Amendment Act (ELAA), Act 31 of 2007 (DoE, 2007) clearly states that the principal of a public school must table the academic performance improvement plan at a governing body meeting, thereby emphasizing the importance of the parent body being responsible for ensuring not only quality education but also that the best interests of the school are served. This is particularly important in underperforming schools. Subsection (2) of the same Act instructs school principals to also provide the governing body with a report on the professional management of the public school, while Sub-section (3) stipulates that the principal should assist the governing body in the performance of its functions and responsibilities (DoE, 2007). Although the intention is to provide school governing bodies with more power to improve quality education, the requirement that school principals should both support and report to SGBs is a potentially conflicting situation which could lead to protracted court cases that would negatively affect the quality of education (Heystek, 2010).

Confusion about the difference between *professional management* and *school governance* is also evident in a case cited by Heystek (2004). In this instance the parents of learners in a particular school felt they had the right to conduct class visits as a form of professional assessment. Arguing that they were paying the salary of an educator employed by the SGB, the parents claimed that this kind of “professional assessment” was one of the ways in which they could ensure quality education. They actually felt that they were *supporting* the principal, being completely unaware of the fact that they were undermining the principal and his SMT - intruding in their territory as stipulated in the Schools Act. Cases like these suggest that the line between school governance and school management cannot be as sharply drawn, either theoretically or practically, as SASA would make it sound.

Mncube (2009a), analysing the overlapping roles and responsibilities of SGBs and SMTs, found that school governing bodies see as their main functions the responsibility to decide on school fees, discipline issues, *and* the *daily running* of the school. It seems as if this perception might have been created by Section 16 of the ELAA (2007), which opens the door to more direct involvement of governing bodies in professional management activities. It is in this section where it is stipulated that the principal must prepare and table a plan of action at an SGB meeting at the beginning of the academic year, indicating to the SGB how the school intends to improve teaching and learning performance. In having to do so, the principal is, in effect, made to account to the SGB for his professional management decisions.

It is therefore not surprising that the SGB believes it has the right to observe and monitor the daily running of the school to ensure that its best interests are served, also in terms of the quality of education being provided. School principals and school management teams are, however, of the opinion that SGB involvement in professional matters constitutes interference in managerial matters, especially since SGB members *are not even educated* (Naidoo, 2005). Another area where SGBs are seemingly given “management functions” is in the development of school policies: this is an SGB responsibility, with school principals and SMTs seemingly playing no more than a supportive role.

The examples cited here illustrate existing overlaps in the roles of school principals and SGBs, overlaps fraught with conflict potential. Instead of harmonising parent-school relationships, the way in which professional and governance roles respectively are described create divisions between SGBs and SMTs. Instead of ensuring that SGB and SMTs see themselves as partners in the common enterprise of quality education, the descriptions of

their role functions create the impression that they are separate and opposite entities engaged in a struggle for power (Naidoo, 2005).

Although, in terms of Section 16(1) and (2) of Schools Act, the governance of every public school is vested in its governing body, and although the governing body is supposed to stand in a position of trust towards the school, the situations sketched in the preceding paragraphs illustrate Fullan's claim (2007) that teachers and parents live in conditions of mutual mistrust and enmity. Even though they both wish the child well, it is a different kind of *well*, with each party being convinced that, since its position is the right one, it should take its *natural opponents in education* down in the best interest of the child.

It is in the context of this kind of friction that I would argue that school principals have a very special role to fulfil, that of reconciling disparate views like the ones highlighted here. Unless they are able to do so it is highly likely that the smooth running of their schools will be disrupted. Principals, by virtue of their position as heads of their schools, are pivotal to the implementation of school-based reform. The structural arrangement which requires them to both head the SMT and to *ex-officio* represent the department of education in school governing body deliberations (Naidoo, 2005) implies that the ultimate responsibility for managing the proposed changes lies in *their* hands. The principal, not the SGB, is the key figure, the catalyst, and the change agent around which much of the school's activities revolve (Fullan, 2007). In practical terms, in his capacity as the professional leader, the school principal has to do everything possible to ensure that the conduct of the school governing body and of the provincial education departments is lawful, fair and reasonable (Joubert, 2007). By implication, he has to watch over the interests of the provincial education departments when functioning as a school governing body member and over the interests of the governing body when dealing with provincial education departments.

The question thus arises, "How should principals deal with possible friction or conflict that may arise in the implementation of school policies?" I would like to argue that there are a number of avenues open to them, some of which I would like to interrogate in Section 2.3, which follows.

2.3 Managing policy conflict

The focus of this section is on conflict theory, with specific reference to the nature and origin of conflict, conflict as an existing and unavoidable organisational phenomenon, and the effect

of conflict on organisations, especially on organisations that are not well managed. In discussing conflict I aim to put into perspective conflict brought about by school governance legislation in South African schools. I also map, at a conceptual level, the different ways in which managers respond to conflict situations in their schools, paying particular attention to three responses, namely *resistance*, *sub-contracting* and *mediation*.

2.3.1 The nature and origin of conflict

In terms of Section 1 of the Constitution of South Africa, the primary aim of the Constitution is to establish a representative democracy, supplemented by direct and participatory governance – that is, a democracy in which the people participate not only in governance decisions that affect them but also when they are asked to make decisions on other matters (Joubert & Prinsloo, 2009). Section 23(1) of the South African Schools Act makes provision for the creation of the requisite democratic structures and participatory processes by means of which stakeholder representatives (parents, educators, non-educators, learners in secondary schools, and even the State, as represented by the principal) could become members of school governing bodies (DoE, 1996). In theory the intention is that governance powers and responsibilities will be distributed more equally between all stakeholders: policies should be developed through a process of rigorous deliberation, with all stakeholders, regardless of age, gender, or race, having equal decision-making power. This, according to Mncube (2009b) is the way in which democracy will manifest itself.

In practice, though, one cannot ignore the reality that the processes and outcomes of any kind of human interaction are affected by the personal likes and dislikes of those involved (Ghaffar, 2009). Members of school governing bodies, like other human beings, have diverse ideas, goals, values, beliefs and opinions about the need for and nature of school governance (Van Der Merwe, Prinsloo & Steinmann, 2003). The complexity of schools as organisations peopled by individuals often drawn from a range of cultures but working towards a common goal – effective teaching and learning (Van der Mescht & Tyala, 2008) – lends credence to claims like these.

As pointed out earlier, the different ways in which parents, educators and learners on the SGB interpret and enact their functions, participation, representation and decision-making powers in school governance matters highlight the existence of underlying historical, structural and ideological conflicts. In other words, given the role that ideological, power and

value relations play in shaping forms of participation, representation and decision making, one could argue that conflicts and dilemmas are an integral part of school management (Naidoo, 2005).

Conflict occurs when individuals or groups feel they are not getting what they need or want and therefore decide to pursue either their individual/self-interest or the interests of the group with which they are associated. In this regard Duma (2010) cites a case where the parent component of a rural school governing body did not agree with the principle that pregnant girls should be allowed to attend school until the time they give birth, despite the fact that Section 9(3) of the Bill of Rights prohibits direct or indirect unfair discrimination against anyone on one or more grounds, including race, gender, sex, pregnancy, etc. In another case, the SGB decided that all learners had to attend religious morning assemblies at school. In terms of Section 31(1) of the Bill of Rights, people belonging to a religious community may not be denied their right to establish, join and maintain their cultural or religious associations and bodies. However, in terms of Section 15(2) (c) of the Schools Act, the attendance of religious observances at a school is free and voluntary. In both these cases differences in the way the parent component of these SGBs interpreted the laws negatively affected their relationship with other members of the SGB, particularly with school principals, who had a different understanding of the law (Heystek, 2006).

Conflict could have both a positive and a negative effect on an organisation depending on the way it is managed (Okotoni & Okotoni, 2003). It becomes *negative* (destructive) when it draws attention away from other important activities, undermines morale or self-esteem, polarizes people and groups, reduces cooperation, increases or sharpens difference, and leads to irresponsible and harmful behaviour, such as fighting, name-calling and so forth. Two instances of negative conflict in South Africa during the apartheid regime which illustrate the impact of negative conflict are the Sharpeville massacre of 1960 in which many students lost their lives and in which principals were stigmatised because of racial conflict (Fleisch & Christie, 2004) and the 1976 Black Consciousness student protest against the introduction of Afrikaans as an additional medium of instruction in South African schools (Wanyande, 1999).

Other parts of the continent have not been exempted from the negative effect of conflict, with schools frequently being the centres of tension. Sometimes such conflict could be seen as a manifestation of problems in the community (Ghaffar, 2009). At other times it could be the

result of tensions amongst governors, between governors and principals, and/or between governors and staff members (Bush & Gamage, 2001). In Nigeria, for example, conflict in educational institutions was so bad that soldiers were deployed to schools to assist teachers in controlling learner behaviour (Ndu, 2000). In Kenya cases of learner unrest broke out across the country in 1991 when, in one mixed secondary school, male learners invaded the girls' dormitories and violently raped a number of them. Nineteen (19) girls lost their lives in the resultant conflict (Agengá & Simatwa, 2011). These and many others incidents are stark examples of the negative impact that conflict could have on school learning.

Conflict is *positive* (constructive) when it results in the clarification of important problems and issues, generates solutions to problems, involves people in resolving issues important to them, promotes authentic communication, encourages cooperation between people, and helps individuals develop greater understanding and / or additional skills. For example, two departments in a school could agree on the goal to improve learner discipline but not on the means to achieve it. Constructive conflict could result in an increased awareness of problems that need addressing, and/or in broader and more productive searches for solutions. In general, therefore, constructive conflict could facilitate positive change, adaptation and innovation (Jonkman, 2006).

2.3.2 Policy conflict in South African schools

School principals here and elsewhere are faced with three dilemmas, according to Wildy and Loudon (2000). Firstly, there is the dilemma of *autonomy*, which requires them to provide leadership that is strong and shared. Secondly, there is the dilemma of *efficacy*, which demands that they provide leadership that is both democratic and efficient - in terms of the time available and effort required for decision-making. Thirdly, there is the dilemma of *accountability*, with school principals being held accountable for the extent to which the school complies with government or systemic policies without neglecting the need to generate local commitment.

These dilemmas constrain school principals in two ways: first, in the establishment and use of participatory decision-making structures, and second, in defending centrally developed / defined policies (Wildy, 1999). In this regard it should be borne in mind that conflicts which emerge during the policy-making and implementation phases respectively are typically played out on the field of what role-players regard as their legitimate and / or perceived

powers. In a strongly unionised environment like South Africa, educators may rely on the perceived power of their unions to buffer their course for or against the implementation of a particular policy. School governing bodies may lay claim to the powers allocated to them in the South African Schools Act (Act 84 of 1996) to further their cause, while principals may rely on the historical and allocated powers associated with their office to strengthen their position.

Research evidence (Leithwood, Jantzi, 2006; Chapman, 1990) suggests that school principals find it challenging to delegate or devolve power and authority to teachers, parents and students. One of the reasons for their unwillingness to collaborate or share responsibilities with members of the SGB is a deep-seated fear that they might lose their power (Mestry, 2006; Naidoo, 2005; Tsotetsi, Van Wyk & Lemmer, 2008). Consequently, they reach decisions on their own, using the SGB mostly to rubber-stamp these. Principals who are afraid of losing their authority might well resist the required changes, either overtly or covertly. Those who are afraid, not of losing power, but of the conflict associated with change might sub-contract or rely on an outside mediator to achieve the required outcome.

Resistance behaviour like this on the part of school principals has resulted in many parent governors no longer trusting principals or the decisions they take. In fact, principals are often regarded by SGBs as not being truthful and / or of deliberately misleading them. According to Tsotetsi *et al* (2008), this distrust has resulted in school governors placing their reliance on a person or persons outside the school to best deal with sensitive matters rather than believing everything they are told by principals. In other instances teachers, parents, and the community, although also reluctant to relinquish their power to the principal and/or to allow him/her to have a free hand in decision-making (Chapman, 1990) do so anyway because they feel that they lack the skills and experience required to participate in decision making.

2.3.2.1 Resistance to policy implementation

The White Paper on Education and Training (DoE, 1995) clearly states that:

...the principle of democratic governance should increasingly be reflected in every level of the system, by the involvement in consultation and appropriate forms of decision making of elected representatives of the main stakeholders, interest groups and role players. This requires a commitment by education authorities at all levels to share all relevant information with stakeholder groups, and to treat them genuinely as partners.

Implied in this stipulation is the intention of the State to create a new school governance landscape based on citizen participation, partnerships between the State, parents, learners, school staff and communities through the devolution of power to the individual school and community. This move grants schools and their constituent communities a significant say in decision-making (RSA, 1996). It also, however, has the potential to cause conflict and, by implication, result in resistance from different interest groups.

Resistance refers to actions taken by individuals and groups that feel threatened in some or other way. Change could be seen as a threat, with any response that hinders the change process, either at its beginning or during its development or any action aimed at retaining the status quo, i.e. keeping things as they are, could be regarded as resistance. From a conflict management perspective, the introduction of a new policy could cause polarization and/or an unwillingness to adopt the new policy for whatever reason. This, too, would be regarded as resistance (Morgan, 1997).

It would be naïve to think that stakeholders will always respond positively to policy changes. Research indicates that the reasons for such policy resistance are multifaceted. According to Leithwood, Steinbach and Jantzi (2002), some teachers resist change initiatives because they believe there is insufficient evidence to support the positive effects claimed by the reformers. Their study indicates that educators' contexts and / or beliefs could even in cases where there is strong agreement with government intentions and a robust sense of efficacy influence them to resist policy implementation. Morgan (1997) argues, therefore, that it is of the utmost importance to take cognizance of local realities and possible resistance factors that could hinder policy change when developing or implementing policy.

Resistance could take different forms. *Passive resistance* could, for example, take the form of either delaying policy implementation or simply ignoring it, usually based on claims that the school lacks information on policy reform. *Active resistance*, on the other hand, could be demonstrated by means of class boycotts or strike action by educators (Morgan, 1997). In its extreme, active resistance could well lead to the total collapse of a system as illustrated in a speech delivered by the Deputy Minister of Education in South Africa in 1997.

In many of our education departmental offices, there is a chronic absenteeism of officials, appointments are not honoured, and punctuality is not observed, phones ring without being answered, files and documents disappear, letters are not responded to, senior officials are inaccessible, there is confusion about roles and responsibilities and very little support, advice and assistance is given to schools

... Many of our parents fear their own children, never check the child's attendance at school, are not interested in the welfare of the school, never attend meetings, give no support to the teacher or principal

.... Many of our teachers are not committed to quality teaching, their behaviour leaves much to be desired, are more interested in their own welfare, are not professional and dedicated, are never at school on time, pursue their studies at the expense of the children, do not prepare for lessons

... Many of our children are always absent from school, lack discipline and manners, regularly leave school early, are usually late for school, wear no uniform, have no respect for teachers, drink during school hours, are involved in drugs and gangs, gamble and smoke at school, come to school armed to instil fear in others

... Many of our principals have no administrative skills, they are sources of conflict between students and teachers, sow divisions among their staff, undermine the development of their colleagues, fail to properly manage the resources of their school, do not involve parents in school matters.

(Mkhatshwa, 1997)

The examples given by Mkhatshwa (1997), the deputy minister, serve as illustrations of the devastating long-term results and inevitable destruction of a culture of teaching and learning (Fleisch & Christie, 2004) that could result from policy resistance by departmental officials, school principals, educators, parents and students.

Power plays could also result in resistance, especially in the South African education context. Local studies indicate that decisions on who should or should not take part in the “democratic governance of schools” are often determined in the course of some or other power struggle (Harber & Mncube, 2011; Heystek, 2011; Xaba, 2011; Duma, 2010; Phaswana, 2010; Mncube, 2009a, 2009b, 2008, 2007; Brown & Duku, 2008; Tsotetsi *et al*, 2008; Adams & Waghid, 2005; Naidoo, 2005; Marishane & Botha, 2004; Mabasa & Themane, 2002). The structural arrangement in terms of which school principals are charged with heading the internal management of their schools and acting as ex-officio representatives of the department of education seems to have created the impression that they are the dominant players in school governance (Naidoo, 2005).

The existence of this perception is reiterated by Chapman (1990), who argues that the structural arrangement places principals at the apex of the human relationship pyramid where they function both as change agents and as the custodians of resources. Duma (2010), explaining the existence of the perception from a historical angle, moots that in the past

parents had no legal authority in the area of school governance and that school principals were considered to be the only people with the requisite knowledge and authority to make decisions (Mabasa & Themane, 2002; Tsotetsi *et al*, 2008). This could be the reason why principals still occupy a very powerful position in schools, a position that is legitimised through numerous policy frameworks, amongst which are PAM and the Employment of Educators Act.

Given this context, it is not surprising that the devolution or relinquishing of power and authority by school principals to teachers, parents and to learners (Naidoo, 2005; Leithwood, Jantzi, 2005a; Chapman, 1990) poses a great challenge to many school principals. The dominating role they still play in meetings and decision-making, evident from issues raised by the principal and / or educators are typically accepted, no matter how others feel about these (Mabasa & Themane, 2002) is indicative of their and other stakeholders' reluctance to let go of historical positions of power (Brown & Duku, 2008; Mncube, 2005; Bush & Heystek, 2003). Principals' reluctance to give up or share power with others is, according to Mestry (2006) and Tsotetsi *et al* (2008), also reflected in the lack of collaboration between the principal and other SGB members.

Principals, fearing a loss of power, are often unwilling to share the responsibility for school governance with others. One of the functions of school governing bodies, for example, is communication with relevant stakeholders by means of annual parents meetings and budget meetings. According to Naidoo (2005), some principals regard it as their responsibility to call these meetings and to draw up the agendas, with or without the consultation of the chairperson of the SGB. Grant-Lewis and Naidoo (2004) also found that despite explicit provisions in the Schools Act regarding who should participate in SGBs and what this participation should entail participation is essentially determined by school principals: it is they who decide who may participate in what and how, and which decision-making activities should be open to participation.

The covert exclusion of parents was specifically investigated by Mncube (2007), whose research findings indicate that, since most of the governance decisions in some schools are taken by the senior management team instead of by the SGB, the parent component is not really given a chance to play a meaningful role in the governance of schools. In one instance cited by Mncube (2009a) the principal and his senior management team took a decision concerning learner discipline without involving the SGB as they should have in terms of

Section 9(1) of the Schools Act (RSA, 1996). Sadly, even when parent members of the SGB are offered the chance to take part in decision-making processes, they seem afraid to challenge the *status quo* of the school, mostly because they fear that their children might be victimized by either the principal or the educators.

Consequently, parent governors end up accepting decisions with which they do not agree (Mncube, 2009b). According to Xaba (2011), this might well be because educators are more concerned about their own position, regarding themselves as “watchdogs” whose role it is to “fight” for educator issues. This, Xaba (2011) argues, creates the impression that educator interests supersede those of the school.

In other schools not only parents but also learners who serve on the SGBs are covertly excluded from SGB participation. They might, for example, not be invited to meetings, or meetings could be conducted in the evenings, or in English, or for a short period – an hour – only (Mncube, 2007). Exclusions like these could lead to various forms of resistance, some of which, although not easily identifiable, could hamper change and / or policy implementation. Moreover, resistance to policy changes or implementation could easily spill over to or infiltrate other areas where SGB members other than school principals and / or educators hold strong opinions. Principals’ reluctance to give up or share the powers historically conferred on them, as well as the existence of contested areas of power – management versus governance – clearly indicates that conflict between parent representatives and other stakeholder groups in the SGB is latent.

Prior to 1994 parent participation in decision-making was minimal while that of learners was virtually non-existent. An analysis of South African history reveals, however, that this notwithstanding, both these groups played an important role in the struggle against apartheid education. Including both these parties – parents and learners – in the post-1994 school governance model could be seen as an acknowledgement of the role they played in the liberation struggle (Heystek, 2011; Mncube, 2009b; Fleisch & Christie, 2004). Secondary school learners in particular were deliberately included in school governance structures like the SGBs for this reason. The irony is that although they serve on SGBs, learners are effectively invisible when it comes to actual decision-making (Naidoo, 2005). In general, their participation at meetings is limited to discussions on fundraising, learner discipline, and sport activities (Tsoetsi *et al*, 2008). It is especially in the area of curriculum that learner inputs are severely restricted, with the majority of principals arguing that learners lack

curriculum expertise and should therefore do no more than observe deliberations on curriculum issues (Phaswana, 2010; Mabasa & Themane, 2002). Principals are adamant that they (principals) and SMT members should take crucial decisions in this area as they regard themselves as the only SGB members who are knowledgeable in curriculum matters (Mncube, 2009a, 2008, and 2007).

The fact of the matter is that parent members in SGBs may legally (SASA, 1996) lay claim to their position as school-based policy developers, a position that is categorically supported by the Federation of Governing Bodies of South African Schools (FEDSAS) which *supports the principle of maximum devolution of school management to public school governing bodies, and endeavours to expand governing bodies' rights and competencies* [my emphasis]. Should the parent component of the SGB constitute a majority, as assumed in SASA, parents would, theoretically, be in a position of power. This power could, however, be eroded in many ways. One of these, already mentioned, is the reluctance of principals to share or give up their historical powers. The building of alliances between sub-groupings, even in the greater parent component of the SGB, could however, also be an erosive factor. In this regard Brown and Duku (2008) found that, in most of the schools involved in their research, it was socially accepted that the views of the elders should be respected because old age represents wisdom and symbolises dignity and leadership. Elderly men also appeared to judge their younger counterparts as lacking in the esteem and social quality necessary to take up prominent roles in school governance. For this reason, young males are usually not elected as parent representatives of governing bodies.

2.3.3 Managing conflict

Informed by the aforementioned research findings I accept as a premise that role-players, including school principals, might resist change and / or the way in which policy implementation is managed is a real possibility in South African schools. Those principals who do not resist change, who try to manage it in such a way that conflict is either eliminated or minimised, tend to use one of two strategies, namely *sub-contracting* and *mediation*. Both of these are discussed in the sub-section that follows.

2.3.3.1 Sub-contracting as an education conflict management strategy

In the context of this study *sub-contracting* means that the change manager implements policy in accordance with the wishes of a particular group, which could be the department of

education, the SGB, educators or other stakeholders. The principal, a sub-contractor, therefore merely form one more link in a chain that connects policy developers with the educators who have to implement it and the learners who have to ‘consume’ it (Day *et al*, 1999).

From a power play perspective a principal who sub-contracts might assert his position of power to coerce others into accepting what he regards as government policy. He would, for example, translate the policy in terms of his own understanding of its intentions and / or implications and, because he believes that his interpretation is the only correct one, he would expect others to slavishly implement it in terms of what he regards as government prescripts. By so doing, the principal satisfies the need to please his employer at the expense of satisfying his own needs and / or the needs of other stakeholder groupings (Cunningham, 1998). The consequence, according to Mncube (2008), could be a power struggle between different categories of school governors, most likely between the school principal and the governing body chairperson.

A different form of sub-contracting would occur in the abdication or relinquishing of power by the State, educators or parents to a dominant interest group. By implication, the interests of a particular group, rather than common interest, would determine when, if and how a specific policy should be implemented. While conflict is avoided in this way it is by no means resolved and, if latent, could eventually become a destructive force. Instead of sub-contracting, the principal should rather try to marry the needs of different parties because, according to Cunningham (1998), their needs are not necessarily mutually exclusive. More often than not they are universal. What is important is that all the parties should feel that they have some control over the process and that the process itself allows for or creates opportunities for the pursuit of other societal developmental needs.

I would argue that the position of the principal should be understood within a broader socio-political context where other forces are also at play. While the State has committed itself to the transformation of education, it is up to provincial departments of education to ensure that this happens, hence the proliferation of policies and other regulatory frameworks. On the one hand, ministers of education and their officials assume specific powers over school principals and their SGBs; on the other hand they expect district officials and principals to execute these powers on instructions handed down from head office. Numerous court cases attest to the conflict resulting from these power plays, with departmental officials simply assuming that

schools would sub-contract into directives issued by head office. I will illustrate this briefly by looking at a specific court case, namely the *Head of Department, Mpumalanga Department of Education v. Hoërskool Ermelo*, 2010 (2) SA 415 (CC).

The facts of the case are, briefly, that Hoërskool Ermelo is a formerly white school with a successful academic track record. Its language policy, as determined by the SGB, is Afrikaans *only*. Because of dwindling enrolment numbers the school was, at a particular point in time, not fully utilized in terms of government policy. A small number of Black learners who were willing to be educated in Afrikaans had already been enrolled at, and were receiving education at the school. Because of a lack of school places in Ermelo for learners who wanted to receive secondary school education in English the Head of the Education Department (HoD) of Mpumalanga requested the school to enrol an additional number of black learners in Grade 8 and educate them through the medium of English. The school was willing to enrol the learners but only if they were prepared to be educated in Afrikaans. The HoD then revoked the SGB's power to determine language policy and appointed an interim committee to take over this function. This committee changed the language policy to make the school a parallel medium Afrikaans and English school and a number of black learners who wanted to be educated through the medium of English were henceforth enrolled in Grade 8.

Informing the outcome of this case are specific Constitutional provisions (Act No. 108 of 1996) regarding language in education issues, namely that:

[e]veryone has the right to receive education in the official language or languages of their choice in public educational institutions where that education is reasonably practicable. In order to ensure the effective access to, and implementation of, this right, the State must consider all reasonable educational alternatives, including single medium institutions, taking into account: (a) equity; (b) practicability; and (c) the need to redress the results of past racially discriminatory laws and practices (RSA, 1996).

In another case, *Schoonbee and Others v MEC for Education, Mpumalanga & Another* 2002 (4) SA877 (t) against the same school the principal and deputy principal of Ermelo Hoërskool were suspended by the Head of the Mpumalanga Provincial Department of Education on alleged charges of misusing school funds and the school governing body was dissolved. Informing the suspension of the school principal was the premise that he is the accounting officer of school funds. According to Prinsloo (2006), the ruling indicated that the principal:

- has a duty to facilitate, support, and assist the governing body in the execution of its statutory functions relating to assets, liabilities, property, and financial management of the public school and also as a person to whom specific parts of the governing body's duties can be delegated, and
- is accountable to the governing body, and it is the governing body that should hold the principal accountable for financial and property matters that are not specifically entrusted to the principal by the statute (Prinsloo, 2006).

Implied in these rulings are some guidelines for the establishment of equal power relations between the school and the school governing body. As stated in Section 20 of the South African Schools Act (Act 84 of 1996), one of the functions of a school governing body is to develop and implement various policies, including those pertaining to religion, code of conduct for learners, admission, and language. Moreover, the school has to develop and adopt a school finance policy in order for it to manage its finances effectively and efficiently. In accordance with the Act, such policies must be developed and adopted by *all* stakeholders concerned and implemented as stipulated (Mestry, 2006). Many schools do not, however, have finance committees in place as required by Section 30 of the Schools Act 84 of 1996 and, according to Marishane and Botha (2004), although schools are encouraged to establish finance committee structures, there is often no follow-up investigation by the district officer responsible for school governance to establish their actual existence and functionality. It is therefore not surprising that, in some schools, the principal and the chairperson of the SGB take all the decisions regarding finances of the school (Mestry, 2006).

In some cases principals procured financial policies from other schools and asked SGB members to sign / rubber-stamp their schools' decisions as if they had been developed for and were applicable to their own schools (Mestry, 2006). In other instances, the SGBs rely on the inputs of educators to help them draw up and implement policies, with the SGB acting as no more than a "rubber stamp" (Mestry, 2006; Tsotetsi *et al*, 2008). There is, therefore, the likelihood that educators could take advantage of the situation and develop policies that suit their interests (Xaba, 2011). Principals are also guilty of the same thing, using the expertise of educators to formulate the school constitution before taking it to parent governors for ratification (Tsotetsi, 2004). In most of the cases the principals justified their behaviour by stating that most parent governors are not educated and that those who are educated do not have the time or necessary skills to assist in the process (Tsotetsi, 2004).

As mentioned earlier, it is the role and responsibility of the chairperson of the SGB to draw up the agenda for meetings, but this is not the practice in most of the schools. School principals are typically the ones who initiate and draw up the agenda for SGB meetings, sometimes in consultation with the chairperson (Naidoo, 2005) but most of the times not. Where they do so in consultation with their SGBs, according to Mabasa and Themane (2002), the school principal and the SGB chairperson tend to form an alliance and dominate debates on issues raised. In instances like these, Mncube (2008) and Naidoo (2005) found, parents complain that they are not always given sufficient opportunity to participate in the decision-making processes (Naidoo, 2005).

Another area of contestation is that of curriculum. Although Section 9 of the Education Laws Amendment Act (Act 31 of 2007) stipulates the need for more parental involvement in professional matters, it would be naïve to believe that educators and principals would willingly allow this. One of the reasons could be that educators might be afraid that parents will notice that the academic work being done in the classrooms is inadequate because of a lack of preparation, time on task activity or limited knowledge about the curriculum and methodology (Heystek, 2010).

The evidence presented here seems to suggest that one of the reasons why school principals tend to sub-contract is to retain some measure of authority and / or their position of power. Another could be that they are simply trying to avoid or ignore the existence of conflict instead of mediating it.

2.3.3.2 Mediation as an education conflict management strategy

In this sub-section I look at mediation as an education conflict management strategy. Theorists have defined mediation differently depending on their point of view at a particular time. Moore (2003), for example, defines it as an intervention in a negotiation or conflict by an acceptable third party who has limited or no authoritative decision-making power but who could assist the involved parties in voluntarily reaching a mutually acceptable settlement of issues in dispute. Goodpaster (1997) regards it as a problem-solving negotiation process in which an outside, impartial neutral party works with disputants to assist them to reach a satisfactory agreement whereas Bush and Folger (1994) define it as a process in which a third party works with conflicting parties to help them change the quality of their interaction from negative and destructive to positive and constructive.

All three these definitions mention a third party, a mediator who could serve different purposes. Because of this, mediation is often equated with negotiation. While there are some similarities between them, these processes are not exactly the same. In a process focusing on mediation, parties with apparently incompatible demands hand over only the dispute resolution process, *not* the dispute itself, to the mediator (National Open University of Nigeria, 2006). In contrast, the purpose of a negotiation process is to resolve the dispute, i.e. to reach common ground and / or a compromise between disputing parties.

Other terms often confused with mediation are arbitration, case evaluation and litigation. Mediation differs from arbitration in that a mediator makes no decisions as to how the conflict should be resolved while the arbitrator does; rather, the mediator guides the parties themselves towards determining a resolution. Mediation differs from case evaluation in that the mediator makes no finding as to the value of the claim and there is no penalty if the mediator is unsuccessful; a case evaluator makes value decisions and can be penalized for wrong decisions. Lastly, mediation differs from litigation in that it is quicker and less expensive than litigation and allows disputing parties to work out their own solutions in private rather than having an unknown result imposed on them by a judge or jury in the course of a lengthy, expensive and formal process (National Open University of Nigeria, 2006). Unfortunately the latter – litigation – seems to have become the norm in many school related conflict cases in South Africa.

According to Bush and Folger (1994), mediation could serve two very different purposes – *problem-solving* and *transformation* hence the terms *problem-solving mediation* and *transformational mediation*. Each of these approaches is briefly described here with a view to comparing and relating them to the South African school governance context.

(a) Problem-solving mediation

Problem-solving mediation serves a dual purpose, namely to find solutions to problems, and to generate mutually acceptable settlements. Noce (1999) describes this type of mediation as *interest-based bargaining* informed by *individualist ideology*. According to individualist ideologies, human beings are essentially pre-social, that is, they establish firm boundaries between the self and society, with humans regarded as separate, independent, and autonomous beings. It follows that, in terms of this premise it is their particular needs and interests which motivate individual human beings to interact with others, and / or even to create inter-dependent relationships with others. Seen from this point of view human relations

are naturally and appropriately *transactional*, typified by economic models of arms-length contractual relations between unrelated individuals. Consequently, according to Noce (1999), human beings who subscribe to an individualist ideology are typically calculating, even selfish, and interested primarily in maximising their own benefits or gains.

An analysis of the prescribed composition of school governing bodies from this ideological perspective indicates that SGB members are elected to represent specific interest groups (RSA, 1996) – parents, educators, and learners. By implication, promoting and protecting the interests of the group they represent would be regarded as a key function of the SGB – parents representing parents’ interests, educators representing educators’ interests, and learners representing learners’ interests (Bush & Gamage, 2001). This is already fertile ground for conflict, especially given the stipulation in Section 20(1) (a) of the South African Schools Act No. 84 of 1996 (RSA, 1996) that, when developing school policies, the SGB must promote the *best interest of the school* and ensure the provision of quality education. Naidoo (2005), illustrating this type of conflict, cites an educator member of the SGB stating that he is *not afraid to oppose the principal if I think it’s in the best interest of educators*. The danger of this stance lies in the possibility that the interests of the constituency might supersede those of the school and, if different stakeholders pursue markedly different interests, the main purpose and function of SGBs will be defeated (Mabasa and Themane, 2002).

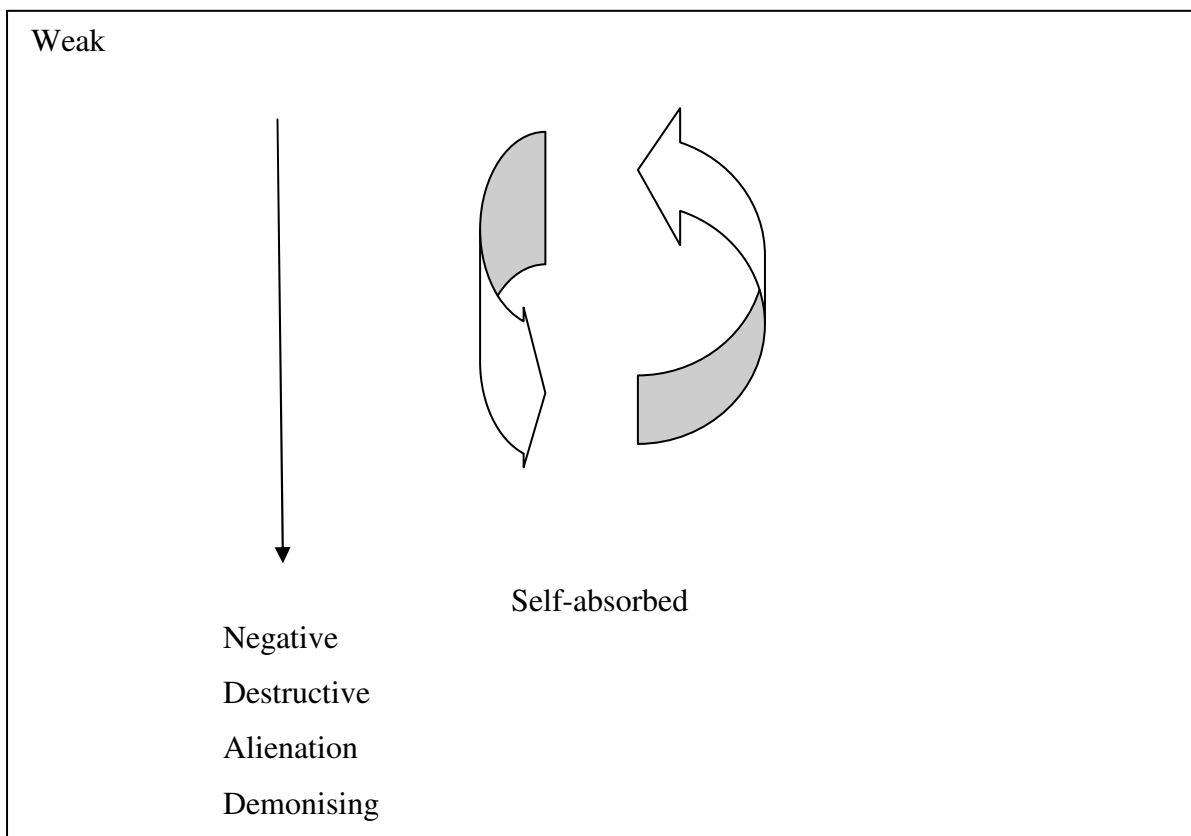
In problem-solving mediation the mediator’s task is to *first* help disputants focus on their interests, and *then* to identify possible solutions to the problem because problem-solving mediators tend to be outcomes-oriented, viewing the process itself in instrumental terms. Their activities typically include “shaping the definition of the problem into a tangible problem to be solved”, discarding any issues raised by disputants if they cannot be treated as tangible problems, and proceeding towards a particular solution (Noce, 1999, Bush & Folger, 1994). Problem-solving mediation is, therefore a multi-stage process.

The first stage of problem-solving mediation (see Figure 2.1), focusing as it does on disputants’ own interests, tends to be characterized by *self-absorption*, with disputants tending to be focused on and protective of the self, and often suspicious, hostile, closed, and impervious to the perspectives of the other person. These behaviours typically occur when one or more of the parties feel *weak* and incapacitated, as if they have lost control of a situation. Confusion, doubt, anger, uncertainty, and indecisiveness are therefore at the order

of the day. No matter how strong people are, conflict propels them into relative weakness. No matter how considerate of others people are conflict propels them into self-absorption and self-centeredness (Bush & Folger, 2005). Experiences of weakness and self-absorption do not, moreover, occur independently; rather, they reinforce one another in a continuing feedback loop: “the weaker I become, the more hostile and closed I am toward you; and the more hostile I am toward you, the more you react to me in kind; the weaker I feel, the more hostile and closed I become”, and so on until the whole process becomes a *vicious circle* (Bush & Folger, 2005).

Because their goal is to reach a solution, problem-solving mediators consciously attempt to control emotions that have the potential to either prevent or inhibit a settlement between opposing parties. Disputants are discouraged from discussing the past since this often results in blaming, a focus that could make progress even more difficult. Rather, disputants are guided to focus on what they want in the future, and to think of ways in which their interests could be pursued and / or their desires satisfied. They are urged to move forward, from one stage to the next, as quickly as possible, with deadlines being used as inducements towards reaching an amicable agreement (Bush & Folger, 2005).

Figure 2.1: Illustration of Problem-solving mediation



Source: Bush & Folger (2005)

Applying this model to the South African SGB context, Mestry (2006) and others (Naidoo, 2005; Xaba, 2011) found that self-absorption and its concomitant emotions are part and parcel of many school governance conflicts. Numerous instances have been cited of principals and educators blaming the ineffective execution of SGB functions on parents' low levels of education, parents blaming educators for undermining their efforts and looking down on them because of their so-called illiteracy, and educators blaming principals for being undemocratic and influencing parent-members of the SGBs. School governing bodies where conflicts like these occur are infused with social tension, rejection, domination, and psychological stress, emotions which could well lead to the isolation and exclusion of parents and learners from low socio-economic status families (Harber & Mncube, 2011; Heystek, 2011). If, as Folger and others (2001) argue,

..... the negative conflict cycle is not reversed, if parties do not generate some sense of their own strength and some degree of understanding of the other, it is unlikely that they can move on (moving out of the negative conflict interaction itself and parties intuitively know this and want help in doing it) and be at peace with themselves, much less each other. In effect, without a change in the conflict interaction between them, parties are left disabled, even if an agreement on concrete issues is reached. The parties' confidence in their own competence to handle life's challenges remains weakened, and their ability to trust others remains compromised. As a result, the parties' ability to function either in the family, workplace, the boardroom, or the community, is permanently damaged.

(b) Transformative mediation

The second mediation approach, as described by Bush and Folger (1994), is *transformative mediation*. As the name implies, the primary purpose of this type of mediation is the transformation of opposing parties' relationship with one another – usually from negative and destructive interaction to interaction that is positive and constructive. The latter kind of interaction is meant to benefit everybody concerned: disputants would derive personal, societal and public benefits from such a transformation simply because the quality of their interaction would have changed (Bush & Folger, 2005). Noce (1999) calls this kind of mediation *relational transformative mediation*.

The transformative mediation approach tends to be process-oriented, with success being defined in terms of improvements in disputants' personal clarity and interpersonal understanding (Bush & Folger, 2005, 1994; Folger & Bush, 1996; Noce, 1999). The premise

on which transformative mediation rests is that individuals in conflict should seek to improve the quality of their relationship with their opponents, first by seeking a better understanding of themselves and of the opposing party and then by creating shared meanings. Both parties must, however, strive towards the same goals, namely *empowerment* (growth in strength of self), and *recognition* (concern for others). Crucial to the success of this approach is opponents' realisation that they first need to understand themselves before they attempt to understand others. Like any other transformative process, this takes time (Fullan, 2007). The mediator's task, therefore, is not to seek resolution of the immediate problem but rather to foster opportunities for empowerment and recognition.

Contrary to the problem-solving approach, where mediators attempt to lead disputants out of the self-absorption stage - away from feelings of *weakness*, incapacity and loss of control and the confusion, doubt, anger, uncertainty, and indecisiveness typical of this stage – transformative mediators encourage disputants to confront their own issues and to seek their own solutions. Informing the latter approach is the assumption that accepting responsibility for their own emotions and solutions make disputants more aware of their own position and values. This awareness, in turn, enables them better to deal with difficulties they will be facing when they seek to see and understand another person's point of view (Bush & Folger, 2005; Folger, 2002; Noce, 1999).

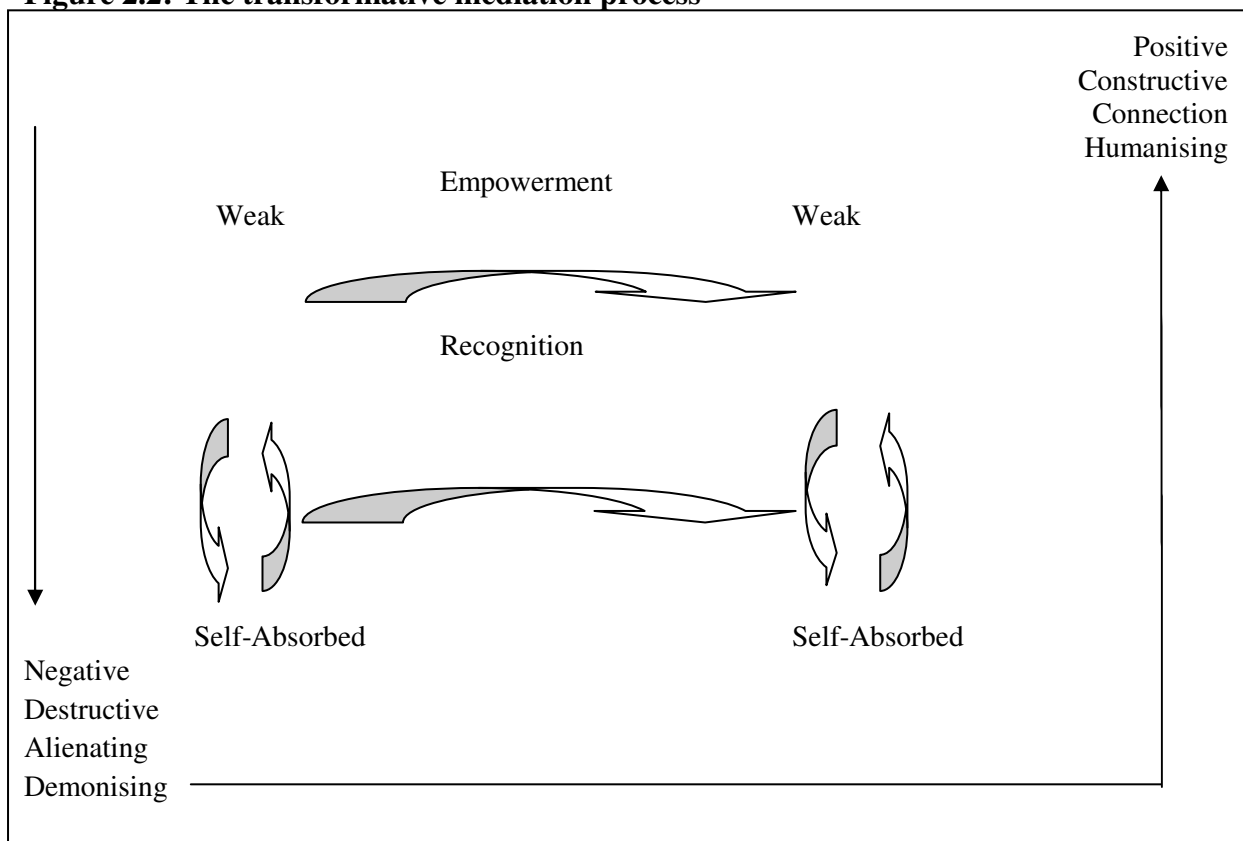
Wong (1998), phrasing the same idea somewhat differently, moots that change begins within the persons concerned – in their hearts, heads, and in hands. According to Wong (1998), transformative mediation is essentially about helping people understand the problems they are facing, helping them to manage these problems, and even teaching them how to learn to live with their problems. Rather than looking at conflict as a dispute which needs to be settled, Wong argues, transformative mediators regard conflict as an integral part of human interaction, which is why they focus on the way(s) in which disputants interact with each other during mediation rather than on the outcome of the dispute.

Instead of emphasizing or prioritizing personal or opposing views, transformative mediators help parties recognise and exploit opportunities for moral growth inherent to conflict (Bush & Folger, 1994). In doing so, they move disputants from a position where they feel unsettled, confused, fearful, disorganised, or unsure to one in which they are calmer, clearer, more confident, more focused or more decisive. Once this happens, disputants are able to identify the resources available to them and / or the resources they need to make informed choices.

They come to realise that they hold something that is of value to the opponent, that they can communicate effectively with the opponent, and that they can utilise their resources to pursue their goal(s) (Bush & Folger, 2005, 1994). More importantly, they are enabled to improve their own skills in conflict resolution, they learn how to listen, communicate, analyse issues, evaluate alternatives and make decisions more effectively than they could before and, because of this, they begin to be more responsive to others (Folger, 2002; Noce, 1999).

Disputants' newly-acquired ability to see and understand the opponents' point of view – to understand how they define the problem and why they seek the solution that they do – either enables parties in conflict to reach a mutually satisfactory solution, or suggests other approaches for handling the situation. At this stage, disputants move from being *self-absorbed*, defensive, suspicious, and unable to step outside their own views to being more attentive to the opponent, more open and more willing to accept the other (Bush & Folger, 2005, 1994).

Figure 2.2: The transformative mediation process



Source: Bush & Folger (2005)

In working with disputants, transformative mediators may make suggestions about processes and ask questions, but they do not direct the conversation, nor do they suggest settlement

options (Bush & Folger, 2005). All in all, the transformative mediation process helps disputants to recapture their sense of competence and connection, to reverse the negative conflict cycle, to re-establish constructive interaction, and to move forward on a positive footing, all with the mediator's help (Bush & Folger, 2005).

... the stronger I become the more open I am to you. The more open I am to you, the stronger you feel, the more open you become to me, and the stronger I feel. Indeed the more open I become to you, the stronger I feel in myself, simply because I am more open; that is, openness not only requires but creates a sense of strength, of magnanimity.

(Bush & Folger, 2005)

In the South African education context inclusion and trust are key transformation principles, with the core values embedded in a highly political, value-led contingency model of transformational school leadership. Entrepreneurialism, the improvement of academic achievement, and the ethics of care, compassion and social justice are key features of this model (Day, 2005). Transformation and its mediation would therefore entail more than simply putting the latest policy in place: it would require intensive action sustained over several years to transform – physically and attitudinally – the cultures of classrooms, schools, districts and universities (Fullan, 2007).

(c) Problem-solving versus transformative mediation

There are many differences between transformative and problem-solving mediation (see Table 2.1). During *problem-solving mediation*, mediators focus disputants' attention on desired end results rather than on their own feelings and / or emotions in an attempt to move them away from feelings of weakness to feelings of strength. In *transformative mediation* disputants are confronted with their own interest-based self-absorption towards a better understanding of themselves and others in order for them to reach a mutually satisfactory solution (Bush & Folger, 2005). Put somewhat differently, in problem-solving mediation the aim is to reach a settlement whereas in transformative mediation the aim is to provide disputants with a forum where they can talk through their issues in the presence of a neutral third party (Bush & Folger, 1994).

Table 2.1: Comparison of transformative and problem-solving mediation (summary)

Idealised description	Transformative mediation	Problem-solving mediation
Assumption about conflict	Conflict is an opportunity for moral growth and transformation.	Conflict is a problem in need of a solution.
	Conflict tends to be a long-term process.	Conflict is a short-term situation.
Ideal response to conflict	Facilitate parties' empowerment and recognition of others.	Takes collaborative steps to solve identified problem; maximizes joint gains.
Goal of mediation	Parties' empowerment and recognition of others.	Settlement of the dispute
Mediator role	Secondary parties are seen as experts, with motivation and capacity to solve own problems with minimum help.	Mediator is expert, who directs problem-solving process.
	Mediator is responsive to both parties.	Mediator directs parties.
Mediator actions	Mediator explains concepts of mediation, but lets parties set goals, direct process, design ground rules. Makes it clear settlement is only one of a variety of possible outcomes.	Mediator explains goal as settlement; designs process to achieve settlement, sets ground rules. May consult parties about these issues, but mediator takes the lead.
	Mediator "micro-focuses" on parties' statements, lets them frame issues themselves.	Mediator "categorises" case, frames it for disputants.
	Mediators allow parties to take discussions where they want them to go; encourage discussion of all issues that are of importance to the parties, regardless of whether or not they are easily negotiable.	Mediators direct the discussions, dropping issues which are not amenable to negotiation (i.e. relational or identity issues) and focus on areas "ripe" for resolution (usually negotiable interests).
	Mediators encourage mutual recognition of relational and identity issues as well as needs and interests.	
	Mediators encourage an examination of the past as a way of encouraging recognition of the other.	Mediators discourage discussion of the past, as it tends to lead to blaming behaviours, focus instead is on the present and future — how to solve the current problem.
	Emotions are set as an integral part of the conflict process; mediators encourage their expression.	Emotions are seen as extraneous to "real issues." Mediators try to avoid parties' emotional statements, or emotions are tightly controlled.
	Mediators encourage parties' deliberation of situation and analysis of options; parties' design settlement (if any) themselves and are free to pursue other options at any time.	Mediators use their knowledge to develop options for settlement; can be quite directive about settlement terms.
Mediator focus	Mediators focus on parties' interactions, looking for opportunities for empowerment and / or recognition of the other.	Mediators focus on parties' situation and interests, looking for opportunities for joint gains and mutually satisfactory agreements.
Use of time	Time is open-ended; parties spend as much time on each activity as they want to. No pre-set "stages" as in problem-solving mediation.	Mediators set time limits, encourage parties to move on or meet deadlines. They move parties from "stages" to "stages".
Mediation: definition of success	Any increase in parties' empowerment and / or recognition of the other—"small steps count".	Mutually agreeable settlement.

Source: Adapted from Bush & Folger (1994)

2.4 Mediation as an education leadership role

My study explored the possibility that school principals, who are *ex officio* members of school governing bodies, could act or fulfil the role of mediators between the different interest groups. Informing my exploration is the premise that conflict is not as static as it is perceived to be; rather, it is a dynamic phenomenon in which parties can – and do – respond in extraordinary ways (Bush & Folger, 2005).

Conflict is neither constructive nor destructive: it is the way in which it is handled that makes it positive or negative (Ghaffar, 2009). The exclusion of educators, learners or parent governors from decision-making forums is not the way to handle conflict. Stakeholder groupings who are not allowed to participate in decisions that affect them will not understand the function or importance of support structures within schools (i.e. SGB, SRC, SMT etc.) and will therefore not know how to channel their grievances. As a result, they might end up in the streets, protesting against authorities in order to resolve their grievances. It is therefore up to mediators to invent the already turning wheel by choosing a leadership style that would enable them to transform destructive interaction into interaction that is more positive. How they could do this is the focus of this section.

As indicated earlier, the South African education system, like many others across the world, is becoming increasingly complex. Much more is expected of education professionals and of school principals in particular. The number of role players and the extent of their involvement in school matters have also increased, thus expanding the scale and complexity of school management. Principals need to realise that their traditional roles are changing and will continue to be reshaped, redefined and renegotiated to align them with the restructuring of the educational system (Murphy, 1994; Hargreaves, 2000). In other words, principals will no longer be able to act as if they were autonomous professionals; rather, they should regard themselves as post-modernist professionals (Hargreaves, 2000). The time has come for them to relocate from the apex of the pyramid to the centre of the network of human relationships, functioning as change agents and resource persons (Mncube, 2009a; Fullan, 2007; Bush & Folger, 2005; Murphy, 1994). They should realise that school leadership is no longer their sole prerogative; it is the joint responsibility of all the stakeholders. Moreover, equality in stakeholder representation, participation and decision-making is now mandatory, with power and responsibilities being distributed equally amongst all participants regardless of their age, gender, level of education, or race.

... Schools must become professional communities within which teaching and learning depend heavily upon creating, sustaining, and expanding a community of research practice. Members of the community must be critically dependent on each other. Collaborative learning is not just nice but necessary for survival. This interdependence promotes an atmosphere of joint responsibility, mutual respect and a sense of personal and group identity.

Sergiovanni (2001)

Implementing school policies in such a context poses many challenges to school principals, especially in terms of their leadership role (Hallinger, 2010; Hallinger & Hausman, 1993). Key amongst these is the challenge of interpreting and translating national and provincial policies into school policies. Given the different interests and literacy levels of relevant stakeholder groupings, interpretations and translations are bound to differ and, without proper leadership, conflicts generated by these differences might result in ineffective or delayed implementation of important policies. This is what happened in the case of the new religion policy for schools in South Africa: public debates on the inclusion or not of different religions in the national curriculum generated extensive public debate and resulted in delayed implementation (to be discussed in detail in Chapter 3).

In contexts like these, where conflict is more than likely, it would be up to school principals to ensure that relations between the various parties are cordial and constructive. In order to effectively build such relations the principal should first transform the quality of his own intrapersonal interactions and then do the same with those of stakeholder groupings. In other words, it is up to the principal to manage any intra- or inter-personal conflicts that may hinder or impede policy implementation. “What transforms education, is a transformed being in the world” (Palmer, 1998). I would argue that one way of effecting such transformation is through mediation which, although already a familiar practice in the field of labour, is as yet under-developed in fields like education.

2.4.1 The Feuerstein Mediation Model

The preceding discussion on mediation brought to the fore some of the general characteristics of good mediators. In this sub-section I discuss these characteristics within the context of school leadership. Put differently, I consider which of these characteristics are critical to a school principal’s ability to mediate conflict, especially conflicts related to transformation and policy implementation. Since it will be impossible within the scope of this chapter to

explore the issue in full, I have chosen a specific theoretical mediation model, namely Feuerstein’s Mediated Learning Experience MLE model (MLE), as my frame of reference. Also, both the Feuerstein model and my exploration focus on mediation in an educational focus. While Feuerstein focuses on the mediation of student learning I focus on the mediation of conflict by school principals.

According to Feuerstein’s (1980) theory, mediation is the:

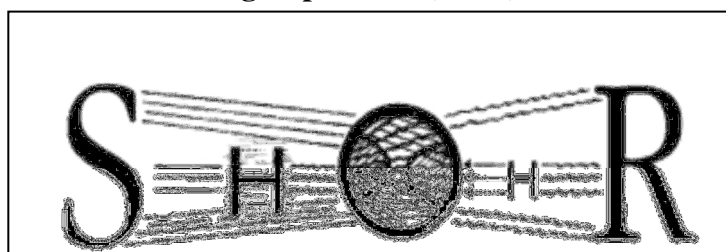
... Way in which stimuli emitted by the environment is transferred by a ‘mediating’ agent, usually a parent, sibling or other caregiver. This mediating agent, guided by his intentions, culture, and emotional investment, selects and organizes the world of stimuli for the child... Through the process of mediation, the cognitive structure of the child is affected.

By “organizing the world of stimuli” in order to change the child’s “cognitive structure”, the mediator is, in fact mediating the child’s learning experience. Feuerstein (1991 in Chang, 1993) defines a mediated learning experience (MLE) as the “quality of interaction between the organism and its environment”. Applied to the context of school leadership, MLE would refer to the kind of experience provided by a school principal who understands the interests, needs, and capacities of various stakeholder groupings and who can play an active role in the creation of two-way interaction (Chang, 1993). Such a principal, according to Sergiovanni (2001), would provide

Leadership for meaning, leadership for problem solving, collegial leadership, leadership as shared responsibility, leadership that serves school purposes, leadership that is tough enough to demand a great deal from everyone, and leadership that is tender enough to encourage the heart. These are the images of leadership we need for schools as communities.

According to Feuerstein and Louis (1990), a mediator intervenes between the stimulus, the organism, and the response so as to interpret, regulate, elaborate, and reinforce a learner’s experience (see Figure 2.3).

Figure 2.3: The Mediated Learning Experience (MLE) model



Source: Feuerstein (1991)

For the purpose of my argument the S in the figure refers to the stimulus, the H to the principal as the mediator, the O to stakeholder groupings, and the R to the response of the individuals.

Academics often say, “Learning is not about things, it is about self”. Self-knowledge is also crucial to effective leadership because leaders without it would not know what their assumptions, values (what they stand for), passions, vision of the way things ought to be, limitations, shadow side, and skills are. Leaders with self-knowledge are realistic and honest with and about themselves and others. Getting to know oneself implies reflecting on who one is, what one does or thinks and why. Doing this, according to Bandura (2007), is easier if one has a sense of self-efficacy, that is, if one believes in one’s ability to do well despite existing obstacles. The development of self-efficacy is not, however, a unidimensional and linear process. Rather, various forces, key amongst which are environmental, behavioural and interpersonal factors, dynamically interact in shaping the individuality of each person (Hassaskhah, 2011).

What all of this implies for school leadership is that the school principal should, in mediating policy implementation, strive to know himself before attempting to know the things and people around him. Self-knowledge is a pre-requisite for knowledge of others – staff, learners and relevant stakeholders, in the case of school principals – not only in terms of who they are, but also in terms of their needs, interests, and capabilities. Without such knowledge school principals would not be able to lead them to where they should be going (Palmer, 1998).

Principals who know themselves, their staff and students, usually also know what is best for the school. They are not threatened by education policies and legislation that require the participation of all SGB members in either school governance or the professional management of a public school, regardless of those members’ age, sex, race, socio-economic status, or level of education. Instead, they embrace whatever reform such legislation proposes as long as it serves the interests of the school. They understand that their professional management role does not rule out their role as instructional leaders. Consequently they learn how to execute management functions in the service of such educational goals (Murphy, 1992a). Being transformative mediators they use what they know about their staff to consistently and vigorously promote staff development, whether through in-service training, visits to other schools, or schemes requiring peer support. In so doing, they focus not only on

developing teaching and non-teaching staff in areas that are of direct benefit to the school, but also in areas that will benefit the individual (Chen, 2008; Theoharis, 2007). To determine where development is needed, they make time for teachers to meet and discuss teaching and to observe one another's teaching. Poor teaching is not ignored or tolerated; where it exists, they use appropriate strategies to improve the quality of teaching. Should these not result in improvement they take further steps, usually combining structured support and monitoring with individualized development programmes until the quality of teaching improves (Harris, 2006, 2002; Ho, 2010; Theoharis, 2007).

Well developed and motivated staff members regard themselves as playing a key role in school governance and societal development since they understand themselves, their learners and their role in the policy implementation process (Fullan, 2007). Acknowledging the need to change the cultures of their classrooms, schools, and districts, these educators choose to work together in the joint planning of teaching and learning materials, observe one another's classroom practice, and seeking, testing, and revising teaching strategies on a continuous basis. They regularly acquire and / or develop new materials (instructional resources such as curriculum materials or technologies), new teaching approaches (new teaching strategies or activities), and new philosophical orientations (pedagogical assumptions and theories) that underpin policies and / or practice. They feel obliged to go all out to seek ideas that are more relevant and advanced, engaging in *continuous learning* (Fullan & Hargreaves, 1992) activities such as reflective practice, personal journals, action research, as well as in innovative mentoring and peer teaching and learning activities.

Principals who are also transformative mediators acknowledge that they cannot successfully implement and sustain new policies if role players work in isolation from one another (i.e. educators as educators) – without any collaboration. They therefore create opportunities not only for teaching staff but for the entire school community to work and learn together, to take charge, and to find better ways of enhancing young people's learning (Stoll, Bolam, McMahon, Wallace & Thomas, 2006). By involving educators, support staff, parents, and governors in school improvement efforts and structures – school committees, task forces and staff development groups – they build healthy school and classroom cultures (Mendez-Morse, 1992).

According to Palmer (1993), transformative leaders genuinely like their followers, something which is possible only if they also love themselves since *the origin of knowledge is love*.

The goal of a knowledge arising from love is the reunification and reconstruction of broken selves and worlds. A knowledge born of compassion aims not at exploiting and manipulating creation but at reconciling the world to itself. The mind motivated by compassion reaches out to know as the heart reaches out to love. Here, the act of knowing is an act of love, the act of entertaining and embracing the reality of the other, of allowing the other to enter and embrace our own. In such knowing, we know and are known as members of one community, and our knowing becomes a way of reweaving that community's bonds.

Palmer, 1993

Leaders who genuinely care use a range of strategies to bring out the best in staff, learners, parents and governors (Franey, 2002) – praising them, involving them in decision-making, respecting their professional autonomy and protecting them from unnecessary intrusion or burdens by acting as gatekeepers to external pressures and demands (Harris, 2006, 2002; Day, 2005). Caring principals acknowledge the importance of ‘family, school and community relationships, realising that the “interconnectedness of home, school and community” is a factor in learners’ academic performance and overall development. Acknowledging that multi-level relationships and cultures which value inquiry, reflection, trust and innovation are essential to quality education (Fullan, 2007) these principals make the effort to connect with the community (Loeb, Darling-Hammond & Luczak, 2005; Lemmer & Van Wyk, 2004). They conduct home visits, attend community events, and regularly discuss with parents and communities the positive as well as the negative force of sub-cultures within the community that either contribute to or impede learning. In so doing, they do not only enhance collaboration among all stakeholders but also reflect their commitment to transparency and participatory decision-making (Stoll *et al*, 2006).

Last, but not least, transformative mediators are aware of cultural universals such as values, standards, and norms. School principals who are also transformative mediators realise that effective school communities devote themselves to operating from a “floor” of shared values and ideas that tie everyone together, that provide security and support, and that give the school a special identity, character and purpose (Sergiovanni, 2005). Consequently, these principals attempt to build bridges between groups with different values and / or beliefs, creating opportunities to learn more about one another, and exposing them to new or unfamiliar ideas. Not only do they create learning spaces that honour people’s experiences – giving them room to tell stories about everyday life – but they determine how their personal experiences fit in with those of others, and how their joint experiences relate to more general ‘stories’ about and understandings of life (Palmer, 2004).

2.5 Leadership mediation as a moral imperative

Leadership, like any truly human activity, has its origins in a person's inwardness (Palmer, 1998), i.e. it is who you are that makes a difference. It is one's inner life – one's motives, ideals, dreams, et cetera – that directs one's interactions with others. Philosophically speaking, the human being is viewed as *body*, *mind* and *spirit* (or *soul*), with the latter – spirit – traditionally regarded as belonging exclusively to the realm of theology. Nieuwenhuis *et al* (2007) contest this notion, arguing that spirit, or spirituality, refers to the *inner person*, the essence of who one is. Hillman (1989) too, links spirituality with that which inspires, motivates, and gives meaning to one's life while Lickona (1993) suggests that one's body, mind and spirit work together when one makes moral decisions.

“Spirituality” is more often than not defined in terms of some of other religious framework (Roux, 2006). Conceptual definitions of the term are, however, much more elusive (De Klerk-Luttig, 2008). According to Drees (2000), it “is not only how we think about God, but also how we see ourselves and our responsibilities, how we live with our failures and accept life's darker sides” that defines our spirituality. Palmer (1998, 1999) agrees, arguing that we need to shake off the narrow notion that spirituality is always about angels or ethers, and / or that it must include the word, “God”; rather, he moots, the nature of our spirituality is determined by those questions that we and our learners ask ourselves every day of our lives when we long to connect with the largeness of life. They are questions like, “Does my life have meaning and purpose? Do I have gifts that the world wants and needs? Whom and what can I trust? Will that be on the exam? How can I get a raise? How can I rise above my fears? How do I deal with suffering, my own and that of my family and friends? How does one maintain hope? What about death?”

Such questions are mostly asked in our hearts – inwardly, and usually in settings where “the imperatives of the fearful ego, or of the task at hand, strand us on the surface of our lives” (Palmer, 1998, 1999), being too risky to ask them from one another. Even so, according to Palmer (1999), they reflect the ancient and abiding human quest for connectedness with something larger and more trustworthy than our egos - with our own souls, with one another, with the worlds of history and nature, with the invisible winds of the spirit, and with the mystery of being alive. In Emerson's words, as cited by Miller (1996):

All goes to show that the 'soul' in man is not an organ, but animates and exercises all the organs, like the power of memory, of calculation, of comparison, but uses all these as hands and feet, is not a faculty, but a

light; is not the intellect and the will, but the master of the intellect and the will; is the background of our being in which they lie — an immensity not possessed and that cannot be possessed.

Conceptual analyses like the one above give us greater insight into the ways in which different people, scholars, practitioners, and researchers view spirituality to be, confirming that spirituality is

... a dynamic construct that involves the internal processes of seeking personal authenticity, genuineness, and wholeness of being open to exploring a connection to a higher power of transcending one's locus of centrality while developing a greater sense of connectedness to self and others through relationship and community, and of defining one's role and place in the world and the universe.

Source: Higher Education Research Institute (2011)

All in all, therefore, it seems as if spirituality acts as a life compass, pointing to our inner, subjective life. It effectively involves our experiences at least as much as it does our reasoning or logic. More specifically, it has to do with the values that we hold most dear, our sense of who we are and where we come from, our beliefs about why we are here - the meaning and purpose that we see in our work and our life – our sense of connectedness to one another and to the world around us (Higher Education Research Institute, 2011). Going a step further, Jones (2005) defines spirituality as the rope that shows us the way home. When at home with ourselves and the world, we could, he argues, become *healers in a wounded world*. With these definitions as basis, we could therefore ask, “How can the inner skills (spirituality) of a principal who is also a transformative mediator influence the way in which he leads the school?”

Local research provides some answers to this question, indicating that most South African school principals tend to regard “religion as the indispensable foundation of spirituality” (Roux, 1999a). Consequently they view themselves as spiritual beings having a human experience rather than as human beings who may be having a spiritual experience (De Klerk-Luttig, 2008). Informed by these views these principals are of the opinion that they can best facilitate new policy implementation in the understanding and expression of spirituality, diversity, morality and human nature. These views, I would argue that they hold in them the seeds of transformative “mediatorship”.

Transformative mediators usually have a “calling”, a feeling that they have been called to “make a difference” in the lives of others. In responding to this call they find meaning and purpose in life (Fry, 2003). Whether or not South African school principals view their jobs as a call to service or as a means of earning a living has not been scientifically investigated. What is clear, however, is that school principals who decide to take on the role of transformative mediator would have to exchange their secular – means of living – view of principalship for one that is spiritual – a means of serving. Spirituality is not primarily about success, but about significance and meaning (De Klerk-Luttig, 2008). Principals who want to be transformative mediators need to be able and willing to take risks, to change the *status quo* in the school (Franey, 2002; Jackson, 2000; Simić, 1998; Mendez-Morse, 1992). They should, moreover, be ready and able to face the complex, ambiguous and uncertain situation they will find themselves in, not for their own sakes but for the sake of their schools (Simić, 1998; Mendez-Morse, 1992).

Transformative mediators organise their vision and practices around personal values such as respect for others, fairness and equality, caring for the well-being and whole development of learners and of staff, integrity and honesty (Harris, 2006, 2002). Their leadership values and visions are primarily moral (i.e. dedicated to the welfare of staff and learners, with the latter at the centre) and underpin not only their relationships with staff, learners, parents and governors but also their day-to-day actions (Day, 2005; Day *et al*, 1999).

Transformative mediators have a sense of being understood and appreciated, a sense of being deeply related to their inner selves, to others, and to a nature or power greater than the self. Consequently their decisions are influenced by virtues such as empathy, humility and love – the will to extend these so as to nurture their own or others’ spiritual growth (De Klerk-Luttig, 2008). Through their presence and caring they connect with their followers because, according to Miller (1996), presence is a product of mindfulness and a capability for deep listening. In truly listening to others transformative mediators create spaces for others to release their creativity and potential (De Klerk-Luttig, 2008), thus relating their mediation strategy to the needs and interests of all stakeholder groupings. In the case of principals who are transformative mediators this means that they become aware of the feelings of their staff, learners and parents in and towards the school. Instead of rushing through the day’s events, these principals make time to enjoy their day’s experiences and opportune moments (Miller, 1996).

Research suggests that teachers, parents, learners and the principal form an interdependent whole, held together by trust. Trust is not only the tie that binds them together but also allows for the creation of role sets that embody reciprocal obligations (Sergiovanni, 2005, 2001). Faith, trust and inner security are high when all parties are free of fear, deprivation, anxiety or doubt, in other words, when they feel supported and safe (Sergiovanni, (2005). In Chapman's (1990) words:

Followers' willingness to participate in school decision-making is influenced primarily by their relationships with their principals. They appear substantially more willing to participate in all areas of decision-making if they perceive their relationships with their principals as more open, collaborative, facilitative, and supportive. They are much less willing to participate in any area of decision-making if they characterise their relationships with principals as closed, exclusionary, and controlling.

By adopting a trust-first approach, transformative mediators explicitly communicate to all stakeholder groupings that principals cannot successfully implement and sustain the new policy without their involvement as partners in action (Day, 2005; Day, Harris & Hadfield, 1999). Informed by this premise such principals create the opportunity for stakeholders to take charge of things, to do things without feeling that they are continuously being watched and controlled. Even in their day-to-day activities transformative mediators involve others by working *with* rather than *through* them, harnessing the emerging synergy and willingness to share responsibility and nurturing commitment to teamwork in a learning organisation (Franey, 2002). Constantly emphasising the need to build and sustain a caring, value-led school, run by a collaborative community (Harris, 2006, 2002; Day, 2005), principals who adopt the role of transformative mediators commit themselves to remaining vision-oriented and people-centred (Day, 2005; Mendez-Morse, 1992). By establishing cultures and systems that allow 'bottom-up' as well as 'top-down' approaches to succeed, within a framework of 'inside-out' school improvements (Day, 2005) they make stakeholders feel trusted. This spurs stakeholders on to do their best so as not to disappoint their mediator (Moloi, 2005).

"The mind motivated by compassion reaches out to know as the heart reaches out to love" (Palmer, 1993). Transformative mediators understand that learners, even little ones, are people, too (Fullan, 2007) and treat them like school governance partners, allowing their voices to be heard and making them feel a sense of belonging (Mncube, 2009b; Adalbjarnardottir & Runarsdottir, 2006; Harris, 2006, 2002; Day *et al*, 1999; Purkey & Strahan, 1995). They acknowledge the active role that learners play in the learning process

and the diversity that exists among them in terms of their strengths, interests, cultural and religious backgrounds, educational contexts and living conditions (Tam, 2010; Theoharis, 2007; Franey, 2002; Jackson, 2000; Mendez-Morse, 1992). They are critical thinkers who proactively prepare their learners for a global world in which technology and a diversity of creative talents are in high demand (Zhao, 2011).

Fullan (2007), tapping into the work of various researchers, warns that learners who are disengaged from either the culture of the classroom, in terms of the day-to-day learning, or of the school and community could lead to them regarding themselves as academically, personally, and socially useless. This, in turn, could undermine their ability to deal with the challenges of life later on. Research findings (Fleisch & Christie, 2004; Mkhathswa, 1997) indicate that such learners are regularly absent from or late for school, lack discipline and manners, tend to leave school early, wear no uniform, have no respect for educators, drink during school hours, are involved in drugs and gangs, gamble and smoke at school, and come to school armed to instil fear in others.

Motivationally engaged learners, on the other hand, have a meaningful personal connection with educators and others in the school – they have the motivational capacity to engage in learning. They are able to construct their own meaning and learning about change hence they are motivated to go even further (Fullan, 2007). Given the right to shape their own educational experiences they tend to regard school as an environment that provides them with the resources they need to satisfy their own needs and support their growth, thus ensuring the realisation of their full potential (Zhao, 2011). Phaswana (2010), outlining the benefits learners gain when they are given sufficient space to participate in decision making forums, mention the acquisition of leadership, negotiation, communication, and conflict management skills as well as the willingness and ability to understand others' perceptions, to form new relationships, and to transform their own behaviour.

Furthermore, school principals who are also transformative mediators regard parents as their children's very first educators, acknowledging that the knowledge they have of their children, knowledge that is not available to anyone else, and the skills that spring from their interests, hobbies, occupations, and place in the community are valuable to the school as a whole (Fullan, 2007). Because of this they involve parents and communities in teaching and learning activities (Day, 2005; Harris, 2006, 2002). Also, according to Coleman (1998), such principals:

- Realise that parent efficacy with respect to instructional involvement is dependent upon school invitation
- Legitimise collaboration through an assertion to parents of their rights and responsibilities with respect to collaboration
- Facilitate collaboration by arranging for parent-educator conversations of various kinds, and by providing parents with the knowledge of curriculum and methodology they need
- Encourage collaboration by providing activities that children and their parents can do together; that is, accepting the role of instructional mediator between parents and their children, and
- Acknowledge the results of collaboration by providing adequate and timely information about learner performance.

In other words, a principal who is also a transformative mediator inspires others to “re-structure” and “re-culture” (Moloi, 2005; Datnow & Castellano, 2001; Barnett, McCormick & Conners, 2001) their schools. He models a ‘mind-set’ for success through his own behaviour, words and actions (Franey, 2002) by appealing to the hearts and spirits of stakeholder groupings, tapping into their talents and their abilities, and urging them to persist and commit their skills and knowledge to a common goal (Moloi, 2005). This principal charts a direction which convinces stakeholder groupings that it is time to change (Moloi, 2005; Franey, 2002). In fact, the heartbeat of school leadership is strengthened when word and deed are one, when leadership and virtue work together (Sergiovanni, 2005).

According to Bush and Folger (2005, 1994), people are unlikely to extend themselves when they feel vulnerable and unstable. The transformative mediator, realising this, recognises all stakeholder groupings by encouraging them to participate in deliberations that promote the best interests of the school, including quality education (Tam, 2010; Nieuwenhuis *et al*, 2007; Moloi, 2005; Franey, 2002; Jackson, 2000; Day, Harris & Hadfield, 1999; Chapman, 1990) and by acknowledging individual contributions regardless of gender, age, race, education level or socio-economic status (Chapman, 1990). He creates space for debate and dialogue for all stakeholder groupings to participate sufficiently in decision-making forums, allowing them to exercise their right to participation in deliberations dealing with school governance (Mncube, 2009a) as well as professional management. In such collaborations, the principal becomes less prominent and plays a primarily guiding, advising, facilitating and supporting

role (RSA, 1996; Murphy, 1994). He participates as a mediator, not as the chair of decision making forums (Shields & Newton, 1992). He works with stakeholder groupings to develop goals, ground rules, and processes they want to use rather than proposing solutions. He makes suggestions about processes and asks questions, but not to direct the conversation, or suggest options for settlement (Bush & Folger, 2005). In fact, he “steps back, keeps his mouth shut, gets things started and then lets autonomous professionals go” (Leithwood, Jantzi & Dart, 1990).

The transformative mediator prepares his followers to learn to express their own voices, enables them to define their own issues, and to seek their own solutions (Ho, 2010; Theoharis, 2007; Van Niekerk & Van Niekerk, 2006; Bush & Folger, 2005; Day, 2005; Harris, 2006, 2002; Franey, 2002; Day *et al.*, 1999). Thus, he lets go of the notion of autonomous professionalism and keeps on letting it go, so that others know that they are really in charge (Goldman, Dunlap, Conley, 1991). He brings about issues such as inclusion, care, compassion, democracy, and social justice (Adalbjarnardottir & Runarsdottir, 2006; Day, 2005).

By not performing SGB functions himself but assigning these to senior SMT members, the transformative mediator empowers stakeholder groupings by decisively sharing power and authority, thereby developing not only a collaborative decision-making school culture (Harris, 2006; 2010; Bush & Folger, 2005, 1994) but also a moral one. Sergiovanni (2000) puts it somewhat differently, arguing that people are by nature morally responsive and are capable of responding to duties and obligations that go beyond their self-interest. By appealing to stakeholders’ sense of righteousness, obligation, and goodness as motivations for action and work and by giving them the opportunity to participate in the formulation of school goals and policies the transformative principal unlocks their great potential and capacity to lead (Day, 2005; Harris, 2006, 2002; Day *et al.*, 1999). He not only establishes a sense of competence in them but also enables them to decide on the roles they wish to play, thereby building their self-esteem (Feuerstein, 1980).

A transformative principal enables stakeholder groupings to realise the moral purpose of making a difference in the lives of learners (Fullan, 2007) by encouraging and creating internal support structures for joint planning as well as working arrangements that reduce members’ isolation (Chen, 2008; Nieuwenhuis *et al.*, 2007; Theoharis, 2007; Van Niekerk & Van Niekerk, 2006; Moloi, 2005; Franey, 2002). He nurtures the development of rich

informal networks of relationships (Harris, 2010; Leithwood, Jantzi, Silins & Dart, 1992), allowing stakeholder groupings to recapture their sense of competence and connection, reverse their differences in policy implementation (negative conflict cycle), re-establish a constructive interaction, and move forward on a positive footing, with his help (Bush & Folger, 2005).

Based on the comparison of mediation strategies outlined above, the conceptual analysis in this chapter, and the given definition for conflict (crisis in human interaction), I argue that transformational moral leadership is the most appropriate lens to look at existing conflict in school governance. The parent governors in Mncube's (2009b) study describe a transformational moral leader as the "engine" of the school, the one that they see playing a positive role in SGBs, who serves as a resource person for other members on the SGBs ensuring that all duties are carried out adequately, who sets the tone in SGB meetings, who is responsible for the interpretation of education policies, including the curriculum, and for ensuring that they are well implemented. Mncube (2009a) reinforces this claim by indicating that, with the advantage of his familiarity with official regulations, provincial directives and his better insight and knowledge of educational reform measures, the school principal as transformational moral leader is in a better position to contribute meaningfully to school governance (Mncube, 2009a).

2.6 Conclusion

Very few people embrace change since it requires them to do things differently and thus leave their comfort zone. In this chapter I have charted some of the changes brought about in the South African education system over the past fifteen years and indicated that those transformational changes have created a situation where schools are constantly faced with the introduction of new and diverse policies that could lead to conflict.

My analysis of literature on conflict and change management revealed that school principals in general tend to resist the proposed changes (unwillingness to adopt the new policy), sometimes sub-contracting (implementing the new policy according to the wishes of a particular interest group or department of education). My literature review also convinced me that the most salient strategy for dealing with conflict is mediation, i.e. negotiating with various interest groups to try and reconcile their differences and finding a way in which policy implementation could fulfil the interests of various stakeholder groupings.

I concluded the chapter by looking at the type of leader that has the potential to play the role of mediator, arguing that he should not only be knowledgeable and able but also moral. Only then will he be able to inspire others to rise above their circumstances, to go beyond what is expected of them, not for their personal benefit but for the common good.

CHAPTER 3

THE CHANGING POLICY LANDSCAPE IN SOUTH AFRICA: CHALLENGES IN MANAGING EDUCATION TRANSFORMATION

3.1 Introduction

It is commonly assumed that public education has a significant role to play in the promotion of tolerance for different religions and life orientations, and that this could be achieved if school learners are to some extent exposed or introduced to diverse religious and life orientations (Hansen, 2011). However, according to Masondo (2011), this goal is not likely to be realised within the parameters of State authority. The view is reiterated by Abedian (2011), who suggests that over the past century hardly any issue has been as controversial as the role of religion in public life. In support of his argument Abedian (2011) claims that the evolution of secularism over time has led to social experiments that continue to widely spread undesirable social, economic and consequences. This, according to him, has caused social tension in religious and non-religious groupings and institutions. Moreover, the moral and intellectual outrage against secular state practices both in the East and in the West, has led to a wide range of protests as well as terrorism.

In this chapter I discuss the challenges which the South African government faced in decreasing the dominance of Christian national education, which has been the norm for a long time, as well as the challenges faced by school management in the implementation of proposed reforms in this regard. More specifically, I provide a brief overview of religion in South African education – the condition, options and processes since 1994 which led to the development of a national religion in education policy in South Africa. I also review relevant legislation (the SA Constitution, South African Schools Act [SASA], and the National Policy on Religion and Education), highlighting the ways in which it influenced the whole decentralisation process. In doing so, I pay specific attention to contradictions and contestations with regard to religion in education issues.

While Grimmitt (1987, in Teece, 2010) regards religion as a strong unifying factor in a country, Barnes (2005) regards it as the most divisive force of all, one with the potential to escalate religious intolerance and discrimination. In this regard Abdool *et al* (2007) and Dreyer *et al* (2002) remind us that some of the most horrific wars have been fought in the name of religion. In South Africa religion has over the years been used to divide and oppress but also to inspire people towards liberation (Mkhatshwa, 1998). During the colonial era

people from diverse religious orientations (Christian, Muslim, Hindu, etc.) and cultural backgrounds settled in Africa, not all directly because of colonization. Some people came here because of military invasions, missionary work and other reasons. Christianity was the religion of the majority of Europeans who colonized sub-Saharan Africa. These colonists took it upon themselves to convert Africa to Christianity (Amin, Jankelson-Groll, Mndende & Omar, 1998; Lubbe, 1998; Hellig, 1993; Kritzing, 1993; Omar, 1993; Saayman, 1993) but the slave trade also resulted in an influx of Asians with religious orientations that differed vastly from Christianity. Then, in the late nineteenth century and early part of the twentieth century, people from India and China were brought to South Africa to work in the mines and on the sugar plantations in Natal. Although all these peoples were allowed to practise their own religions, Christianity remained the dominant religion of the colonial masters.

After the National Party came into power in 1948, they deliberately advanced their ideology of Christian national education making it the official education policy in 1967. Actually Christian national education was the brain-child of General Jan Smuts³, the head of the South African Party – the party which governed SA before the National Party came into power. The “Christian national education” taught in public schools did not only give preference to a particular Christian Protestant religious doctrine based on Calvinism but also to an ideology spawned from apartheid principles. Religious Instruction classes served as opportunities for evangelism and the nurturing of Calvinist values and principles. Parent communities not in favour of this were denied the same opportunities to develop their own religious orientations and cultures (Mitchell, 1993). Bible education was taught in most of the State schools and children attended such classes irrespective of whether they were Christians or not. Children were expected to accept Christian national education with its underpinning philosophies and assumptions. Sundays were observed as days of rest, and certain forms of entertainment were taboo on Sundays (Sooka, 1993). Independent schools based on other religious orientations, while allowed, had to adhere to the apartheid policy of racial separation. Provision was, however, made for learners with a Muslim or Hindu religious orientation in public schools controlled by the House of Delegates.⁴

South Africa has never completely denied religious freedom and diversity. The wrongs perpetrated in this regard during the apartheid era could thus be described as a denial of *equal*

³ Its history is actually much longer – reaching back to the 80 and 30 years wars of the Lowlands in Europe against Spanish and Catholic domination.

⁴ An education department created specifically to serve the Indian community in South Africa

freedom and treatment to the followers of religions other than Christianity rather than as a denial of religious freedom *per se*. Such unequal treatment implies a lack of respect for the full diversity of South Africa's peoples and their beliefs and practices (Bilchitz, 2011). This is illustrated by the fact that even though other religions were allowed permission to build temples and mosques, they were not allowed to provide their own religious instruction in public schools (Saayman, 1993) for whites, which were under the control of the various provincial departments, or for blacks, under the control of the Department of Education and Training or the former Bantustans (Transkei, Bophuthatswana, Venda and Ciskei). What is particularly notable is the intolerance against traditional African religions during colonialism and the use of deliberate strategies aimed at estranging people from their religious and cultural roots (Masondo, 2011). For instance, engagement in traditional rituals, adherence to ancestor worship, consulting of traditional healers, animal sacrifices for special events and honouring the spirits of the ancestors were marginalised (Masondo, 2011) and / or frowned upon. Muslim, Jewish, Catholic and Hindu communities had to establish their own religion-based private schools, many of which were in fact created within white, coloured and Indian communities (Saayman, 1993).

The co-existence of numerous religions in South Africa over the years indicates that religious diversity has always been an integral part of South African society. However, because of discrimination, religious freedom and the acknowledgement of religious pluralism did not manifest, or exist, at every level of South African society. Also, because most religious groups seem to know little about the customs, beliefs, and rituals of others (Lubbe, 1998) it is not surprising that groups with different religious orientations were, and still tend to be, suspicious and intolerant of those with different religious orientations (Kilian, 1993). Put differently, respect often comes from understanding and knowledge whereas fear comes from ignorance (Amin *et al*, 1998).

After 1994 displacement, refugee movements and the migration of people due to political, economic and / or religious reasons have increased the pluralist nature of South African society. By implication it is no longer that easy for South Africans to uphold their traditions, customs and beliefs in isolation from others. However, while some could influence other's beliefs, their life orientations, and the like, are not dependent on others for what they believe. Neighbours, groups, communities, and nations are inter-dependent and inter-related, and locally as well as elsewhere we form part of majorities, and minorities simultaneously (Lubbe, 1998). This interconnectedness of communities has resulted in religious diversity

becoming a global feature, having become an accepted part of most nations, states and communities of the world. The learner composition of schools all over the world, being mini-communities, is therefore also a mix of diverse cultures, languages, backgrounds and religions (Amin *et al.*, 1998). By implication there is a need for an educated citizenry that consists not only of lifelong learners but of individuals and groups that are able and willing to live and work in contexts characterized by diversity (Fullan, 2007). South Africa is no exception: since 1994 she has begun to move towards secularism, with the State remaining neutral in terms of religious preference, as will be discussed in more detail later on.

In this chapter I briefly review the government stance on religion in schools as well as its attempts to ensure greater religious tolerance. Since religion is always a contentious matter, it would be normal for any interference in the religious *status quo* to cause tension and conflict. This is especially true in schools, which have to implement new religion policies. Informed by the literature I consulted on the topic, I use this chapter to also touch on some of the debates and discourses that emerged as a result of government efforts to effect changes to the way religion is handled in schools. Lastly, I look at some of the current debates on and tensions related to religion. My analysis should reveal why a study on the implementation of religion policy in schools could contribute to a better understanding of the strategies that principals adopted in the implementation of specific policies, the new religion and education policy in particular.

3.2 Definition of key concepts

Before discussing the government's policy response to the challenges posed by the introduction of a new policy on religion and education, it is important to define a number of concepts that are critical to a sound understanding and interpretation of policy responses.

A review of relevant literature revealed overlaps in the use of the concepts "religion in education", "religion education" and "religious education". For the purposes of my study, it is important to draw a clear distinction between these three concepts since the meanings attached to them seem to lie at the centre of contestations relating to the implementation of the National Policy on Religion and Education (DoE, 2003) in South Africa.

3.2.1 Religion in Education

Narrowly defined, religion can be referred to as a set of beliefs and practices in relation to the transcendent, the sacred, the spiritual, or the ultimate dimensions of human life. In broad terms, religion is a term that embraces many religious traditions, communities, and institutions in society. In all cases religion is viewed as an important aspect of life, hence it is something that children should learn about — both in terms of general and in terms of specific understandings of the term (DoE, 2003). Paragraph 31 of the National Policy on Religion and Education [NPRE] (2003) describes religions as key sources for clarifying morals and ethics, and of building regard for others since all religions are founded on the values of justice, mercy, love and care, commitment, compassion, and co-operation. Hence they chart profound ways of being human and of relating to others and the world.

Scholars and educationists give various definitions to the term “education”, depending on their individual understanding of the concept and of educational matters under investigation at any particular moment. In this study education is regarded as a process by means of which both the young and the old could be provided with appropriate learning opportunities in terms of their aptitude, capabilities, abilities, interests and other attributes. Education, in this study, is therefore conceptualized as a human event that promotes the development of a human being in his / her spiritual, moral, ethical, and social dimensions (Henze, 2003 in Chizelu, 2006), for individual benefit as well as for the benefit of others. In this sense education is therefore seen as an opportunity for people to creatively and innovatively apply knowledge from their past experiences, not necessarily to repeat what past generations have done but rather to produce new knowledge.

Viewed in this light, the concept of religion in education honours and recognises the rich religious diversity of South Africa, thereby reflecting the Constitutional values of citizenship, human rights, equality, freedom from discrimination, and freedom of conscience, religion, thought, belief and opinion (DoE, 2003).

3.2.2 Religion education

In South Africa “Religion Education” is a subject that provides learners with broader education about various religions of the world without promoting any particular faith or belief. As a subject it is intended to educate learners about religions of the world and / or the country (Southdowns College, 2009; Dreyer, 2007).

According to Mkhathshwa (1998), religion education could be seen as fundamental to the provision of meaning and purpose to people's lives since it teaches them about broader society – the poor, the weak, and the lonely - and about their responsibility towards others. It also teaches us, as people, about the universe, creation and the origin of everything, about the world around us, about scarce resources and sustainable living. He further suggests that “no other learning area offers the same exposure to these vitally important issues”. Religion education is also seen as a means of increasing and maintaining community involvement among teenagers (Sasson & Sasson, 2009), a way of preparing learners for life as citizens in a multi-cultural society comprising adherents to various spiritual movements (Ter Avest & Bakker, 2005).

According to Dreyer (2007), religion education leads to religious literacy, i.e. it develops the capacity for mutual recognition (affirmation of own identity while at the same time receiving informed understanding of the religious identities of others). Religion education also has the capacity to inculcate respect for diversity, reduce prejudice and increase civil tolerance, attitudes that are necessary for citizens to live together in a democratic society. It is a way of increasing understanding and respect amongst people of different religions or world views and of fostering respect for freedom of religion or belief as a human right (Jackson, 2005). In short, according to Marashe, Ndamba and Chireshe (2009), religion education integrates diverse cultural and religious elements into one common culture, thus creating unity and a culture in which man can live a truly human life.

Miedema and Bertram-Troost (2008), focusing on religion in schools, consider it to be an important mediating structure, arguing that schools are remarkable mediating institutions, transformative resources in civil society located between the public and the private spheres. Abdool and Drinkwater (2005), argue moreover that religion education is a subject that gives South African learners the advantage of broadening their perspective, equipping them with the ability to engage in inter-religious dialogue, and instilling in them respect for one another as equal citizens of the country.

The teaching of religion education in schools can be approached in various ways, one of which is studying the role of religion in history, society, culture and the world. In this sense a unified, multi-traditional programme focusing on religion as a concept and a way of life could provide learners with a well-balanced and complete education (DoE, 2003). In terms of paragraph 7 of the NPRE (DoE, 2003), religion education in South Africa is a curricular

programme with clear and age-appropriate educational aims and objectives. In terms of these aims and objectives the purpose of the programme is the acquisition of knowledge on religion, religions and religious diversity in South Africa and the world. Paragraph 31 of the NPRE categorically stipulates that moral values are not the monopoly of religions, much less the exclusive property of any one religion. However, by including religion education in the school curriculum the importance of imparting moral, religious and other value orientations through teaching and learning is prioritized. In alignment with the Constitution (Act 108 of 1996) and the South African Schools Act (Act 84 of 1996), the incorporation of religion education content into various learning areas and subjects, especially Life Orientation (LO), in both General and Further Education and Training, is aimed at the transmission of such moral values (DoE, 2003).

3.2.3 Religious education

In the European context religious education refers to multi-religious contents in school curricula, what we, in South Africa, call ‘religion education’ (see 3.2.2 above). In general, though, the term, “religious education” refers to education that is orientated towards instruction in a particular faith, with the aim of understanding and promoting commitment to that faith. It is aimed at educating learners to be faithful to a specific religion (Southdowns College, 2009; DoE, 2003). In the previous dispensation in South Africa this kind of religious education was referred to as Bible Education, Religious Instruction or Right Living (Summers & Waddington, 1996 in Roux & Preez, 2005), depending on the religion concerned. Both the curriculum and the way in which teaching and learning take place in such an approach are therefore mono-religious (one religion) (Roux & Preez, 2005).

In a mono-religious approach like the one described above, the school curriculum would be devotional or doctrinal. According to Dreyer (2007) and Teece (2010, 2008), educators who teach religion in schools which follow this approach advocate or denigrate a particular religion by interjecting their personal views into the teaching and learning process. By implication, learners are encouraged to accept and conform to specific religious beliefs or practices. In adopting this approach, according to Dreyer and Teece, educators reflect insensitivity to and / or a lack of respect for the religious beliefs and practices of learners that are different from those of the school concerned. In a secular State like South Africa, the government does not promote a certain religion or attempt to convert learners from one religion to the other; rather, its aim is to create awareness of the different religions of the

world in terms of a range of beliefs, rituals and values. Informing this aim is the assumption that knowledge about and an understanding of different religious systems will promote tolerance and respect for diversity and for spirituality in general (Abdool & Drinkwater, 2005; DoE, 2003).

3.3 The rationale for religion in education

The overview provided above suggests the existence of inequalities that are deep-rooted in South African education history with regard to religion in particular. One way in which religious public education institutions have discriminated against learners in terms of religion was to subject learners to religious observances without their or their parents' consent. Another was to include confessional or sectarian forms of religious instruction in public school curricula, thereby compelling learners to accept and conform to specific religious beliefs or practices (DoE, 2003). The post-1994 government decided that it was necessary for all religions to be treated equally, also in education, and that learners should be taught to respect religious diversity in their interaction with others.

In recognition of the diverse nature of the South African population in terms of culture, language and religion, the new government regarded it as its duty to develop a unity of purpose and spirit that recognises and celebrates such diversity (Minister's foreword – DoE, 2003). In terms of Section 15 (1) of the South African Constitution (Act 108 of 1996) “[e]veryone has the right to freedom of conscience, religion, thought, belief and opinion.” Section 15 (2) points out that religious observances may be conducted at State or State-aided institutions, provided that (a) those observances follow rules made by the appropriate public authorities; (b) they are conducted in an equitable manner; and (c) the attendance at them is free and voluntary (RSA, 1996). The government is therefore bound to establish a society based on democracy and equal citizenship, and to ensure that the fundamental rights and freedoms of all South Africans are protected. Protecting people's right to belong to any religion without fear of being persecuted or discriminated against (Masondo, 2011) is one way of achieving this purpose.

Freedom of religion was extended to education through the South African Schools Act (Act 84 of 1996) which clearly stipulates that “subject to the Constitution and any applicable provincial law, religious observances may be conducted at a public school under rules issued by the governing body if such observances are conducted on an equitable basis and

attendance at them by learners and members of staff if free and voluntary” (Section 7). Insisting that public schools are institutions with a mandate to serve society as a whole, the South African government is determined to equip learners with knowledge of religion, morality, values and diversity in this regard. Schools are allowed to use religion education to reinforce and/or reaffirm constitutional values like diversity, tolerance, respect, justice, compassion and commitment in young South Africans. Creating opportunities for learners to examine, critically and creatively, the moral codes embedded in all religions, their own and others through religion education (Amin *et al*, 1998) is a one step towards the realization of these goals.

Instead of converting learners from one religion to the other, religion education is aimed at providing learners with the opportunity to develop a deeper sense of self-realisation and a broader civil tolerance of others and to balance the familiar and the foreign in ways that give them new insights into both (Smock, 2005; DoE, 2003). Schools therefore ought to explain what religions are about by indicating clearly - in ways that increase understanding, build respect for diversity, value spirituality, and clarify the religious and non-religious sources of moral values - which educational goals and objectives are being pursued (Abdool & Drinkwater, 2005; DoE, 2003). In doing so, schools would be providing learners with the opportunity to question the validity of values and morals other than their own, in a changing or non-religious society or world view (Roux, 2006).

Just as the right of learners to be at school must be ensured and protected, so must their right to have their religious views recognised, appreciated and respected (Minister’s foreword, 2003). Unlike a single-faith approach to religious education, which provides religious instruction in one religion, or a multiple faith approach, which provides parallel programmes in religious instruction for an approved set of religions, a multi-tradition approach to the study of religion provides learners with the opportunity to study religion as a phenomenon, in all its forms and facets, as an important dimension of the human experience and a significant subject field in the school curriculum (Miedema & Bertram-Troost , 2008; DoE, 2003; Amin *et al*, 1998). Instead of linking the content to the values and morals of a particular religious society which represents the teacher’s own religious orientation, religion education in South Africa is aimed at the presentation and discussion of a world of religious diversity (Roux, 2006).

Researchers like Jackson (2005) support this initiative, indicating that religion education communicates the importance of values that “compel transformation”, values like democracy, social justice and equity, non-racism and non-sexism, Ubuntu (human dignity), an open society, the rule of law, respect and reconciliation (DoE, 2001). Moreover, according to Jackson (2005), it is important in religion education to combat any form of discrimination and intolerance based on religion or belief and to prevent violations of the human right to freedom of religion or belief.

3.4 The development of religion in education policy in South Africa

Given the historical legacy of Christian National Education, the government had to address religion in education in its development of policies after 1994. This had to be done taking the Constitution and its stipulations on religion as points of departure. To facilitate an understanding of the policy frameworks developed after 1994, I start with a review of Constitutional stipulations before analysing the policies that were developed. My analysis is informed by an awareness of government imperatives to identify strategies that would create knowledge, increase understanding, build tolerance and respect for diversity, value spirituality and clarify the religious and non-religious sources of moral values in young South Africans (Abdool & Drinkwater, 2005).

Considering that, in accordance with the principles proclaimed in the Charter of the United Nations (1945), recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world (International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, 1966), a whole plethora of legislation and policies were developed for the purposes of reforming the apartheid state into a liberal democracy. These include the South African Constitution, formally adopted in 1996 as the product of a negotiated settlement (Chidester, 2006), the South African Schools Act (86 of 1996), promulgated as a compromise solution for addressing the diverse school histories (Naidoo, 2005) and, having adopted a *co-operative model*, after years of consultation on the most appropriate way of relating religion to education, the National Policy on Religion and Education, aimed at removing “enforced Christian education from public schools (Van der Walt, 2010; Cross, Mkwanazi-Twala & Klein, 1998). The dimensions of the involved legal documents, schools’ interventions and the impact of all of these on the ground are highlighted and analysed in the next section.

3.4.1 The South African Constitution

In distilling the essential moral vision of the Constitution-makers, the closing paragraphs of the Constitution read thus;

*This Constitution provides the historic bridge between the past of a deeply divided society characterised by strife, conflict, untold suffering and **injustice**, and a future founded on the recognition of human rights, democracy and **peaceful co-existence** and development opportunities for all South African, irrespective of colour, race, class, **belief** and sex.*

*The pursuit of national unity, the wellbeing of all South African citizens and peace require **reconciliation** between the people of South Africa and reconstruction of society.*

*The adoption of this Constitution lays the secure foundation for the people of South Africa to **transcend the divisions** and strife of the past, which generated gross **violations of human rights**, the transgression of humanitarian principles in violent conflicts and a legacy of hatred, fear, guilt, and revenge.*

*These can now be addressed on the basis that there is a need for **understanding** but not for vengeance, a need for reparation but not for retaliation, and a need for Ubuntu but not for victimisation (my emphasis).*

(Republic of South Africa, 1996)

In discussing religion in education the emphasised words are of particular significance as they eventually served as basis for future policies dealing with religion in schools. They should be seen as guiding principles that have to be taken into account when policies are formulated. In this regard it must be emphasized that Section 7(2) of the Constitution asserts that the State must *respect, protect, promote* and *fulfil* the rights entrenched in the Bill of Rights. Through its policies the State therefore has to display respect for religious diversity, protect the religious rights of individuals, promote the rights that will afford people the freedom to practise their own religious orientation, and fulfil its constitutional responsibilities. In doing this, the State is obliged to balance individual rights with group rights. In this section I examine the legal instruments the State has used to date in approaching this task.

In line with Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), Section 15 (1) of the South African Constitution guarantees individual freedom of religion and belief, categorically stating that “[e]veryone has the right to freedom of conscience, religion, thought, belief and opinion”. Section 15 (2) points out that religious observances may be

conducted at State or State-aided institutions, provided that (a) those observances follow the rules made by the appropriate public authorities; (b) they are conducted in an equitable manner; and (c) their attendance is free and voluntary (RSA, 1996).

In legal terms, one juristic person (in this case, a public school) cannot exist within another juristic person (the State). By implication, public schools are not ‘extensions of the State’: they are organs / institutions within the non-State domains of society and as such non-political institutions or societal collectivises (Joubert & Prinsloo, 2009). For this reason, “*a juristic person is entitled to the rights in the Bill of Rights to the extent required by the nature of the rights and the nature of that juristic person*” (Section 8[4]). That public schools are State-aided institutions does not give the State the liberty to limit the rights of individuals or groups within the school in an unjust manner. Neither does it afford the school unrestricted freedom to determine a religious policy for itself since this may result in the development and adoption of discriminatory policies. The State must therefore, in assigning certain functions to school governing bodies in terms of how they want to deal with religion, provide them with guidelines and / or spell out the parameters within which they could do so (RSA, 1996).

The aforementioned argument is in line with Section 31(1) of the Constitution, which guarantees the collective rights of cultural, religious, and linguistic communities. This section ensures that “[p]ersons belonging to a cultural, religious or linguistic community may not be denied the right, with other members of that community (a) to enjoy their culture, practise their religion and use their language, and (b) to form, join and maintain cultural , religious and linguistic association and other organs of civil society” (RSA, 1996). In accordance with Article 2 (1) of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), Article 2 (2) of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1966) and Article 2 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), Section 9(5) of the Constitution prohibits unfair discrimination on the grounds of, among others, religion and, by so doing, enforces respect for and protection of the most basic constitutional values of equality and human dignity. Section 16(2) (c) of the Constitution further extends respect and protection of the right to freedom of religion, reassuring everyone that they have “the right to freedom of expression” indicating, however, that such a right may be “limited” if it extends to advocacy of hatred based on race, ethnicity, gender or religion.

It would, however, be wrong to limit religion to these constitutional guarantees. This is illustrated in a case that dealt with corporal punishment. In the case, *Christian Education SA v Ministry of Education 2000 (4) SA 757 (CC); 2000 (10) BCLR 1051 (CESA)*, an organisation of concerned Christian parents challenged the constitutionality of Section 10 of the South African Schools Act (84 of 1996), which prohibits corporal punishment at school. According to Christian Education South Africa (CESA), “corporal punishment” forms part of a system of “discipline” based on the Christian faith and scriptures. The organization claimed, moreover, that corporal punishment, as administered at its schools, is part of the common culture of such schools, a culture which is protected by certain provisions of the Constitution. In turning down the application, the court pointed out that the biblical authority on which the applicants relied suggested that only parents of children (and not school officials *in loco parentis*) were entitled to administer corporal punishment. This judgment indicates that, even though the Constitution guarantees the right to freedom of religion and expression, religion is still subordinate to the authority of the State — if religion appears in public spaces, it must be regulated in such a way that it does not interfere with the norms and values of the secular State (Masondo, 2011).

3.4.2 The South African Schools Act (SASA)

In alignment with the Constitution, the South African Schools Act (1996) (SASA) contains a pledge of the State to protect and advance the diverse South African cultures and languages, and to uphold the rights of all learners, parents and educators (Preamble, 1996). More specifically, this Act (84 of 1996) stipulates that, subject to the Constitution and any provincial law, “religious observances may be conducted at a public school (a) under rules issued by the governing body, (b) if such observances are conducted on an equitable basis, and (c) attendance at them by learners and members of staff is free and voluntary” (Sec. 7 of the Schools Act, 1996).

It should be noted that, apart from this stipulation, the Schools Act (84 of 1996) does not deal with religion in education, religion education or religious instruction specifically. Neither does it define “religious observances”, thus leaving the door open to schools and their school governing bodies to attach to this statement their own interpretation/s of what is or is not permissible in terms of religion in schools. The Act does not specify *how* schools should *respect, protect, promote and fulfil* the rights contemplated in Section 15 (1) and Section 31 (1) of the Constitution. Section 20(2) of the Act does, however, indicate that school

governing bodies *may allow the reasonable use of the facilities of the school for community, social and school fund-raising purposes, subject to such reasonable and equitable conditions as the governing body may determine which may include the charging of a fee or tariff which accrues to the school.* One could argue that this stipulation opens the door for the use of school facilities by religious organisations for religious purposes and that, in terms of these provisions every school, as a juristic person, therefore has the legal capacity to perform its functions in terms of the Act (Section 7).

Section 16(1) of the same Act stipulates, moreover, that, “subject to the Act, the *governance* of every public school is vested in its governing body and it may perform only such functions and obligations as specified in the Act”. The Act categorically allocates the *professional management* of the public school to principal, who is accountable to the provincial Head of Department (Sec. 16 [3]). These stipulations in the Schools Act (Act 84 of 1996) grant schools and their constituent communities a significant say in decision-making and the devolution of power to stakeholders, who can now participate in the “democratic governance” of schools (Naidoo, 2005). As indicated earlier, this kind of power-sharing is one of the ways in which the government is executing its mission, namely to take into account the diversity of the country, improve the efficacy of the system and redress the imbalances of the past.

Again, the Act does not cover all possibilities that could be linked to incidences of a religious nature. This is clear from a court case, *MEC for Education: KwaZulu-Natal v Navaneethum Pillay 2008 (1) SA 474 (CC)* which was about a learner not being allowed to wear a nose stud since it was deemed a contravention of the school’s code of conduct. The learner’s mother took the school and the KwaZulu-Natal MEC for Education to the Equality Court, alleging that they had unfairly discriminated against her daughter and had violated her religious and cultural rights. The Equality Court found that the school had not unfairly discriminated against the learner but in an appeal to the High Court the decision was overturned, with the judge ruling that the school had unfairly discriminated against the learner (Joubert & Prinsloo, 2009; Mawdsley, Cumming & De Waal, 2008).

The school’s code of conduct was a key factor in the outcome of this case. The Appeal Court found that (a) it did not set out a process or standard according to which exemptions could be granted, i.e. something that could have guided learners, parents and the Governing body on issues like these, and (b) the jewellery provision in the code of conduct does not permit

learners to wear a nose stud therefore Sunali should have applied for exemption in the first place. What this ruling implies is that a properly drafted code of conduct, which sets realistic boundaries and provides a procedure to be followed in applying for and granting exemptions, is the proper way to foster a spirit of reasonable accommodation in schools and to avoid acrimonious disputes such as the one presented above (Joubert & Prinsloo, 2009). This is, however, not indicated in the Schools Act (84 of 1996).

3.4.3 *The National Policy on Religion and Education*

Although the government already realised the importance of developing a policy that specifically deals with religion in schools in 1994, it was not until 2003 that it released such a policy. On release of the National Policy on Religion and Education, the Department of Education explained that it was the product of many years of research and consultation (DoE, 2003). Prior to and post its first democratic elections, the ANC government was faced with the challenge of rethinking and restructuring institutions of the previous era (Du Toit & Kruger, 1998). Quite a number of studies were conducted looking for a possible model that could be used to restructure the relationship between religion and education as part of the National Education Policy Investigation in the early 1990s. The model was first taken up in the National Education and Training Forum during the transitional period of 1993-1994. Extensive consultations concerning religion issues also took place around the Schools Act before 1996. The model was further developed by the Ministerial Committee on Religion Education in 1999 and the Standing Advisory Committee on Religion and Education was established for the same purpose in 2002.

It was during this period that the decision on a *co-operative model* was reached and that the National Policy on Religion and Education emerged as a consensus document on the relationship between religion and education (Government Gazette, 2003). In terms of this *co-operative model*, the South African approach to religion and education recognises not only *separate spheres for religion and the State* under the Constitution, but also a *scope for interaction between the two* (Van der Walt, 2010; Mawdsley, Cumming & De Waal, 2008; Dreyer, 2007). According to the State, its co-operative model was a reaction against both the *theocratic* apartheid model, which tried to impose religion in public institutions, and the USA *separationist model* that completely divorces the religious sphere of society from the secular one (Van der Walt, 2010; Mawdsley, Cumming & De Waal, 2008; Dreyer, 2007).

The National Policy on Religion and Education came into effect on the 4th of August, 2003. Its intention was to encourage schools to promote reconciliation – to bridge the religious divide through a greater understanding of others (DoE, 2001), to ensure peace and tolerance amongst learners belonging to widely different religious affiliations (Abdool *et al.*, 2007), to help learners understand the colourful religious heritage of the country, thus developing respect for other human beings while simultaneously closing the geographical and religious gap between various communities in the country – a space created in the name of civilisation and Christianity (Mkhatshwa, 1998). Put differently, the ultimate aim of the policy is to promote religious freedom, pluralism, diversity, tolerance, respect, justice, compassion and commitment in young South Africans (Abdool *et al.*, 2007; DoE, 2001).

Paragraph 58 of the policy specifies that, in accordance with the Constitution, Section 22 (1) of the Schools Act (Act 84 of 1996), and relevant rules made by the appropriate authorities, the governing bodies of public schools may make their facilities available for religious observances in the context of free and voluntary association provided that such facilities are made available on an equitable basis (DoE, 2003). It also stipulates that SGBs have to determine the nature and content of religious observances for educators and learners. For example, religious observances may form part of a school assembly, but if it becomes an official part of the day, it must be on an equitable basis. This policy not only acknowledges the diversity of belief systems in South Africa, particularly in the school system, but it also calls on principals, educators, parents and learners from diverse religions and belief systems to facilitate religions, values and belief systems other than their own in a professional manner. Educators, in particular, are urged to show appreciation of, and respect for, people of different beliefs, practices and cultures (DoE, 1998).

In order to realise these policy goals in schools, South Africa had to revise the school curriculum to ensure that it, too, reflected the new values and principles, especially those of the Constitution of South Africa (Ferguson & Roux, 2003; RSA, 1996). Consequently, a new curriculum for the General Education Band, known as Curriculum 2005, was piloted in the Foundation Phase in 1996 and implemented a year later. Comments on and concerns about Curriculum 2005, raised by parents, educators and other stakeholders, resulted in its review and the development of the Revised National Curriculum Statement for General Education and Training (Grades R–9) and a National Curriculum Statement for Grades 10–12 before C2005 had run its full course.

Included in the National Curriculum Statement in 2004 were the subjects Life Orientation in both General and Further Education and Training (GET & FET) and Religious Studies in the FET band in which learners undertake the study of religion and religions in general, with the possibility of specialisation in one or more in that context (DoE, 2003). Within Life Orientation, Religion Education was introduced as an optional subject for both independent and public schools on private property. Religion education is aimed at teaching and learning about religion, religions and religious diversity in South Africa and the world (DoE, 1997a). Contrary to the past, a great deal of emphasis is placed on the prohibition of religious discrimination (SA Constitution – Act 108 of 1996).

Of all 29 subjects in the National Curriculum Statement, Life Orientation is the only one that is not externally assessed (DoE, 2008; 2002). However, learners who fail to submit evidence of performance in any of the five formal assessment tasks expected for Life Orientation in each Grade will receive an incomplete result for the subject. The only exception to this rule is where a valid reason is included in the learner's collection of evidence (possibilities that could be linked to such incidences are not provided). Religion Education is allocated 10 hours of the 72 hours per year available for Life Orientation hours in Grades 10 and 11 and 10 of the 60 hours per year in Grade 12. Educators could, as part of their assessment of learner performance, ask learners to answer quiz questions on social and environmental issues. They could also decide whether they want to mark the tasks themselves, or whether they just want to guide learners to assess their own performance or that of their peers. Either way, relevant assessment tools – a memorandum for an informal class test or an observation checklist with relevant diagrams for a practical demonstration – should be used for this purpose (DoE, 2008).

To ensure that the above expectations manifest as a reality the DoE (2003) prepared guidelines and resources to assist teachers of religion education in classrooms. In addition, special requests have been made to religious organisations to assist in the training of educators in this regard. International guidelines are also made available to help educators cope with the challenges and pitfalls associated with the teaching of religion education and to encourage them to distinguish between teaching and preaching. In order to satisfy the requirement that religion education must be facilitated by trained and registered educators the department has appealed to Higher Education Institutions to provide appropriate training to prospective educators by including suitable courses on the study of religion and religions into their teacher education programmes.

Furthermore, the department has established collaborative relationships between universities and schools that go beyond teacher training, with academic communities being expected to assist and advise on the coherence and integrity of the study of religion as a field of study. More specifically, academics have been asked to identify different theories, methods, materials, and resources that could be used in the teaching and learning of religion. In addition to this, the department ensured that provincial authorities, learning area committees, tertiary institutions, publishers, materials developers, religious bodies and researchers in religion education collectively developed such materials.

3.5 Current trends in religion policy discourse

Research evidence suggests that the implementation of the National Policy on Religion and Education was delayed until 2003 due to lengthy and highly charged debates. In spite of its clearly educational aims (Chidester, 2003) the new religion policy in schools provoked a storm of controversy (Chisholm, 2005). According to Roux (2001), attempts and initiatives to change the religion education programmes in schools were received with hostility by many individuals and groups in the religious, educational and public spheres. It is documented that petitions, letters and appeals from religious constituencies that opposed the religion policy flooded the national Department of Education (Chidester, 2006, 2003; Chisholm, 2005). While teacher unions, universities, non-governmental organisations, government departments and other members of the public made submissions supporting the overall direction of the revision, certain Christian and home-schooling groups were preparing for holy war with the Minister of Education (Chisholm, 2005).

The Christian campaign consisted of several Christian organisations arguing that the new religion policy violated their human rights and constitutional freedom of religion (Chidester, 2002). In a memorandum handed to the Department of Education in Cape Town, McCafferty (2003) pointed out that there was no need for the policy. So-called incidents of religious discrimination were few and a far between. It was also argued that there was already sufficient legislation in place to ensure that discrimination does not take place, and to deal with it if it does occur. Concerns were raised about the values espoused in the curriculum, the notion of religion versus religious education in the curriculum, the inclusion of ‘radical sex education’, teaching children the worship of praises and values of other religions, the proposed banning of devotions, including prayer, from school assemblies, a lack of market competition, and an emphasis on State-imposed values (Chisholm, 2005).

Horn (2003) also had strong religious objections to the new policy on teaching and learning about religion, religions and religious diversity in South African schools, arguing that the pedagogical methods of ‘Outcome-Based Education’ (OBE), applied to the teaching and learning of religions, would expose learners to dangerous contact with spirits. In principle, OBE promotes a student-centred, lively, engaging, and participatory approach to teaching and learning (Coetzer, 2001) but Horn’s concern was that the OBE emphasis on “experience and active participation” implied that learners would, for example, have to “participate in dances that induce spirit possession”. She claimed that learners would be exposed to the risk of not only learning about an indigenous African world-view, but would also be participating in spiritual practices based on magic and, ultimately on Satanism, because magic, she observed, “always has Satan as its source” (Horn, 2003).

Section 7 of the Schools Act (Act No. 84 of 1996), which states that religious observances may be conducted at a public school under the rules made by the governing body with the limitation that such observances are conducted on an equitable basis, and that attendance at them by learners and members of staff is free and voluntarily, provoked the following responses from concerned citizens and the media:

Nowhere in the Scripture will you find a mandate for the state to control religious instruction, in fact nowhere in Scripture will you even find the mandate for the state to control education. Conversely, there are many Scriptures mandating the family to instruct their children in the ways of God.

Schools are not some religious neutral space. The State’s new multi-faith religion education is exactly that—a new multi-faith religion, antithetical to Christianity, being forced unconstitutionally on all schools, infringing on religious freedoms.

Why should a bunch of faceless bureaucrats, far removed from the local school and child, working only 9 until 5 and only on a contract basis, lay more claim to our children’s education than the parents who share the same DNA, have the same surname stretching back generations, and have a clear mandate from Almighty God?

Devil has taken over in schools and we are doing nothing about it.

(Citizen, 3 October 2001, in Dreyer, 2007)

Most contestations were raised regarding religious activities which must “follow rules made by the appropriate public authorities” as assured by the Constitution. Chidester (2006) argued that the Minister determined that the national Department of Education, guided by constitutional principles and values, was the appropriate authority. Thus, by exercising its authority over public schools, the department advanced a policy in which religious instruction

became the responsibility of the family, home and religious community, while teaching and learning about religion became the responsibility of the public school. The Minister's and, by implication, the department's stance was also vehemently contested by Christian opponents of the policy such as the Christian Lawyers' Association, which argued that the Minister of Education was not, in fact, the appropriate public authority to determine religion policy and that local school governing bodies, composed of parents, teachers and administrators should be free to determine the religious ethos, observations and instruction in their schools (McCafferty, 2003).

In terms of Section 16(1) of the Schools Act (Act 84 of 1996) the governance of a public school is the responsibility of the school governing body but, according to Section 16(3), responsibility for the professional management of the school is allocated to the principal. The governing body of a public school therefore has no authority to determine the content or teaching methods educators can apply in the teaching and learning of different religions, beliefs and value systems. The only area where they can exercise their authority is in the formulation of a religion policy for a public school with regard to religious observances (i.e. singing religious songs, prayers, and scripture reading). Even then these, if conducted at a school, should take place in accordance with the stipulations of Section 7 of the Schools Act (No. 84 of 1996). With the powers and authority vested in principals by the Schools Act, it is the right and / or responsibility of the principal and his SMT to determine the teaching methods regarding the teaching of Religion Education (RSA, 1996).

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights [UDHR] (1948) states that “parents have a *prior right* to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children”. According to Donnelly (2011), the use of the word, ‘prior’, acknowledges the hierarchy and primacy of the right of parents in relation to the State. Even so, schools continue to exclude parents from decisions taken for their children's education. A number of local researchers (Mestry, 2006; Naidoo, 2005; Tsotetsi, Van Wyk & Lemmer, 2008) found that the exclusion of parents in decision-making is most evident in principals' unwillingness to collaborate and / or to share responsibilities with members of the SGB because they are afraid of losing their power. Often, therefore, principals ensure that they are the ones who make the important decisions, with the SGB mostly doing no more than rubber-stamping these.

Not involving parents in the planning of religion education would constitute not only disobedience to Section 21(b) of the Schools Act (84 of 1996), Section 15(2) of the South African Constitution (Act 108 of 1996), and of The United Nations Charter on Human Rights (1945) since the school would be violating other members' right to equal participation in decision-making processes. Such disobedience from the side of the school would, moreover, constitute a violation of parents' right to choose the kind of education that their children should receive (UDHR, 1948). Parents' dignity is also violated by exclusions like these since their potential to develop tools and / or innovative strategies for the facilitation of learning content associated with different beliefs and value systems are "locked up" (Ferguson & Roux, 2003; Roux, 2003).

Contesting views also erupted against the clause that "religious observances in schools may be allowed provided that they are conducted on an equitable basis". Appropriate and equitable means of acknowledging the multi-religious nature of a school community as spelled out in paragraph 62 of the new religion policy could include separation and rotation of religious observances by learners from different religions on an equal basis, readings of various texts from different religions, the use of a universal prayer or observance of a moment of silence (DoE, 2003). Supporters of the policy question the issue of equity, contesting that if a policy of single-faith religious instruction was to be adopted, the practicality of equality would be questionable as some of religious communities would find themselves unfairly discriminated while others would be unfairly privileged (Chidester, 2006). For instance, Seventh Day Adventists practise their religious devotions on the Sabbath (Saturdays) and Muslims have their observances every Friday at 12:00 while a religion like Christianity is more privileged in sharing its holidays (Easter and Christmas) with the whole nation and the whole of the Western World.

Supporters also argued that, in the process of providing for single-faith religious instruction, the State would inevitably become entangled in discriminating not only against different religions but also against competing constructions of a single religion. Religious educators were not isolated from these debates. They argued that "No child should be exposed to other religions until their own religious identity has been formed". This was echoed by the then Member of the Executive Committee (MEC) in the Western Cape, who indicated that his province would not be implementing the new provisions of the curriculum for Religion Education. He further instructed his province to develop programmes for Grade R through to Grade 6 that do not include requirements for the study of other religions (Gaum, 2002).

Although the debate seems to have died down after the promulgation of the religion policy in 2003, a visit to schools, particularly to schools that used to be based on a Christian ethos, shows that it is 'business as usual'. Duma's (2010) example of a rural school where a governing body agreed that all learners must attend religious morning assembly in school, despite the stipulation in Section 15(2) (c) of the Schools Act that the attendance of religious observances in a school is free and voluntary (see Chapter 2), is a case in point. Many schools, moreover, continue to market themselves as having a Christian ethos, and in some of them, confessional or sectarian Christian religious education is still being offered (Van der Walt, 2011). This, according to Ferguson and Roux (2003), indicates that public schools, which are obliged to implement the new policy, seem to be negative towards the notion of religious diversity. As a result, they still hang on to a mono-religious approach regardless of diversity (religions and cultures) in their classrooms.

Ferguson and Roux (2003) also remind us that religion education programmes in the majority of public schools were, until 1997, officially still based on Bible Education (mono-religious Christianity). This leaves no doubt that the majority of educators and parent governors in public schools are products of schools in which they were exposed either to one religion only, or to no religion at all, with some schools having eliminated religious education from the curriculum of the school (Ferguson & Roux, 2003). It follows that such exposure would have an influence on their perceptions and ethos and that they would find it very difficult to change their perceptions of and attitudes towards people of other religions. This is true for any person, not only educators, who comes from a predominantly mono-religious and / or mono-cultural background (Roux, 2005).

Religion in education remains a controversial subject in South Africa and elsewhere (Van der Walt, 2010, 2009b). In the opinion of many parents, the government school system is hostile to their religious convictions (Dreyer, 2007). An increasing number of court and legislative conflicts between governments and parents over education show this plainly (De Groff, 2009). Key areas of conflict hinge on issues such as whether or not parents may exempt children from certain classes with objectionable content, whether citizens or governments may allocate tax monies to the support of private religious schools, to what extent parents may influence content selection in classes, whether prayer is permitted in schools or at school activities, to what extent may religious student groups exist, and many others (Donnelly, 2011). The case of *Mfolo and others v Minister of Education, Bophuthatswana 1994 (1) BCLR 136 (B)*, where a learner had to sign a code of conduct which included an agreement

that any learner who becomes pregnant would have to leave school since there are some religions that prohibit “sex before marriage”, reiterates the point made above. By so doing, the school violated Sections 9(3) and 29 of the Constitution (Act 108 of 1996) (see section 3.3.1 of this chapter).

Alston, Van Staden and Pretorius, (2003) cited an incident where the school had a clearly laid down dress code, approved by the parent body and with strong support from the learner body. In 1997, a girl was enrolled in Grade 8 by her father, who signed an undertaking which included, “I will ensure that my child attends school regularly and complies with the rules and regulations of the school, which I endorse”. On the first school day, the learner arrived at school in Muslim dress. She was intercepted and the father was asked to fetch her with a note that she could return to school in the prescribed school uniform. In response to this, the father instituted action against the school via the KwaZulu-Natal Education Department, which informed the school that it could not refuse the girl admission to the school. While the school engaged legal counsel, the girl attended school in Muslim attire. At the end of that academic year, the same parent enrolled a second daughter to start in Grade 8 the following year. As a matter of principle, he signed the Code of conduct again but crossed out references to the dress code. His second daughter was refused admission to the school. Finally, the principal was given an ultimatum by the provincial Department of Education to accept the child and to allow her to wear her Muslim dress or to face removal from his post. The governing body relented, agreeing that Muslim girls may wear either Muslim dress or school uniform, but not in combination with each other (Alston, Van Staden & Pretorius, 2003).

In another case, *Danielle Antonie v Governing Body, The Settlers High School and Head of Western Cape Education Department 2002 (4) SA 738*, the school governing body charged a fifteen-year-old Grade 10 learner with serious misconduct because she defied the school code of conduct, which stipulated that “the hair must be tied up if below the collar”. Although she had on several occasions asked the principal for permission to wear dreadlocks to school, the principal refused. Believing that her right to freedom of religion (also expression) was infringed upon, she attended school with a black cap (matching the prescribed school colours) covering her dreadlocks. She was suspended from school for five days for serious misconduct on the grounds that she had disobeyed the code of conduct for learners and had disrupted the school. All these occurrences are evidence to the fact that South Africans are not quite satisfied with the manner in which the State has dealt with the issue of religious diversity in public education (Van der Walt, 2011; Chisholm, 2005).

3.6 Conclusion

In this chapter I presented my understanding of the challenges which the South African government faced in decreasing the dominance of Christian national education as well as the challenges faced by school management in the implementation of proposed reforms in this regard. In doing so I provided a brief overview of religion in South African education prior to and post 1994, the laws governing the provision of religious education in schools and the public's reaction to the changes the State proposed to religion in education.

The court cases referred to in this chapter indicate that not only are aspects related to religion contentious but that it may not be that easy for principals to mediate the implementation of religion in education policies. In fact, from what has been presented, it is clear that school managers are faced with serious challenges regarding the implementation of religion policy in schools. Prime amongst these is the challenge of the obtuseness of the religion policy which seriously impacts on their ability to interpret, analyse, understand and implement the policy within the framework of the related legislations.

The other challenge is that of the rise of decentralisation and the increase in diversity. The establishment and promotion of stakeholder participation in decision-making is constitutional, hence enforceable. In other words, involving stakeholder groupings in decision-making on school life is not negotiable. This poses a serious challenge to the school principal who, in the past, was used to taking all the decisions on school life. Also he might find it difficult to take decisions which go against the grain of his own beliefs and values.

These intuitions will enable me to interpret principals' stories, giving me a greater understanding of the ways in which they deal with such complex circumstances, i.e. whether they *resist* policy implementation (due to their own unwillingness to adopt the new religion policy), *sub-contract* (implement the religion policy according to the wishes of a particular interest group or department of education), or *mediate* (negotiate with various interest groups to try and reconcile differences and find a way in which policy implementation fulfils the interests of various stakeholders).

In the next chapter, Chapter 4, I explain the research design and method used in this study.

CHAPTER 4

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHOD

4.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to describe the design of my study, discuss the research paradigm in which it is rooted and provide an overview of my data gathering, sampling and data analysis procedures.

My research design is informed by and structured around the central question to be addressed in this study, namely, “How do school principals deal with the implementation of the National Policy on Religion and Education in schools?” The research question already suggests a narrative approach to the design of the study, with principals having to recall and reflect on their past, thus creating a story of past events.

4.2 Research design

The philosophical basis of my study is addressed in the first part of the chapter. Informed by the philosophical basis, I designed my research as a phenomenological qualitative study, using narrative interviews as my data gathering technique.

4.2.1 Qualitative research design

In general terms, qualitative researchers believe that human behaviour is significantly affected by the natural setting in which it occurs. In my case the “settings” may vary markedly and could have been shaped by the geo-histories of the schools and the dominant religions operating therein, as explained in Chapter 3. By implication, as Balibar (2006) contends, *heterogeneous points of view on the same questions of principle* could be profoundly engendered by *different geo-histories*.

Applied to a study of school principals’ experiences with religion in education, Balibar’s (2006) claim would mean that, although all the principals live in South Africa, their experiences may have been very different depending on the particular educational system of which they were a part and / or the environment in which they grew up. Like everyone else in South Africa they witnessed and are affected by the changes that have taken place in South Africa since 1994. Some of them might even have been directly involved in effecting the change – as learners who participated in the liberation struggle, as school managers tasked

with implementing new, and often unpopular policies, or as teachers caught between students and school principals.

Qualitative research enables researchers to gain useful insights into social, emotional and experiential phenomena, especially if the context within which they occur is challenging and controversial. My goal was to explore and understand the meanings they construct in their personal encounters with legislation binding them to the implementation of new religion policies but also to uncover the nature of such situations, processes, relationships, systems or people (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005).

The primary aim of my research was to provide an in-depth description of human experience which would enhance my understanding of a specific human phenomenon, human interaction and human discourse (Lichtman, 2010) through the eyes of my research participants. Informed by Lichtman's (2010) definition of the concepts, "phenomena" (lived experiences of humans), "human interaction" (how humans interact with each other, especially in terms of their culture), and "human discourse" (how humans communicate ideas with each other), I focused on the *why*, *what*, and *how* questions that typically guide searches aimed at the discovery or uncovering of the meaning/s attached to the particular phenomenon in question (Slavin, 2007; Hollway & Jefferson, 2000).

Realising the importance of getting close to school principals if I were to gain their trust, I used a form of in-depth interview in which I became the "key instrument of data collection". In this way I could experience for myself the subjective meanings attached to various dimensions of the phenomena I was studying (Johnson & Christensen, 2012; Lichtman, 2010; McMillan & Schumacher, 2010; Slavin, 2007). In analysing the data I collected in this way, I opted to move back and forth between the collected and analysed data so as to interpret and make sense of it (Johnson & Christensen, 2012; Lichtman, 2010). I knew that this task would only be possible if I, as the researcher, asked questions, collected data, gathered information and constructed realities as I deconstructed the data provided by participants. Also, since I was dealing with a controversial issue such as religion, I required a flexible research approach that would allow for the spontaneous adaptation of interactions between the researcher and participants. The qualitative approach satisfied this criterion (Lincoln, 1992).

Qualitative data are usually presented in the form of words which, according to McMillan and Schumacher (2010), capture what has been observed in the same form as that in which they naturally occur in a particular context. In my case, qualitative data provided me with

insights on the ways in which principals construct reality as well as on how their realities were not only shaped by past experiences but also how they are played out in a field of contested ideals and interests as they implement new policy directives. Instead of seeking causal determination, prediction, and generalisation of findings, I sought illumination, understanding, and interpretation of similar situations (Yuen, 2008; Hoepfl, 1997). My aim was to delve into the array of experiences shared by principals, the meanings they constructed in search of possible trends, and the ways in which these could be explained and interpreted. It is in these possible emerging trends that I found the key to answering my research questions.

Having stated “what” and “whom” I wanted to study, I decided that a phenomenological research design was best suited to my study because of its potential to generate new understandings of complex human phenomena such as mediation and sub-contracting, both of which were described in Chapters 2 and 3.

4.2.2 Phenomenological research design

From my literature review, it became clear that very little research has been done about the role of principals in implementing policies (see chapter 3) and that sub-contracting and mediation in management theory have received scant attention (see Chapter 2) It also emerged that a phenomenological research design has seldom been used to study school principals’ experience of their mediating role in the implementation of new policies in South African schools. My decision to adopt this particular research approach was initially based on limited work done on this phenomenon, with specific reference to religion policy given the *lively debates* that have taken place over the past 10 years.

Phenomenology is the study of the lived experiences of individuals who have knowledge of a particular phenomenon (Lichtman, 2010) – what the individual knows best, what is taken for granted in human life, what is always familiar in its typology through experience (Cilesiz, 2008). As an international student at the University of Pretoria, I have not been part of the changing religion policies in South Africa and I have never taught in a South African school. I do not, therefore, share any of my participants’ experiences. In fact, I am an outsider to their experiences. But being born and raised in Lesotho, and being a black female person that grew up in a country where Christianity dominated education provision, I can identify with many of the existing discourses and challenges surrounding the South African religion and education policy.

According to some scholars, phenomenology is “a low-hovering, in-dwelling, meditative philosophy that glories in the concreteness of person-world relations and accords lived experience with all its indeterminacy and ambiguity, primacy over the known” (Wertz, 2005). However, few research designs other than the phenomenological one would have allowed me the opportunity to enter into individuals’ inner worlds of immediate experience, collecting fresh, complex, rich descriptions of a phenomenon as it is concretely lived (Finlay, 2009) in order to understand participants’ particular perspectives. By implication, I was aware of preconceptions or learned feelings I had about the phenomenon, their potential role in research and then attempted to control them so that they do not play an inordinate role in research (Johnson & Christensen, 2012; McMillan & Schumacher, 2010; Sharma-Brymer & Fox, 2008; Slavin, 2007).

According to Giorgi (1989), in Finlay (2009), research is rigorously descriptive, uses phenomenological reductions, explores the intentional relationship between persons and situations, and discloses the essences or structures of meaning imminent in human experiences through the use of imaginative variation. So, I attempted to control *a-priori* expectations in entering my research participants’ worlds as that would require me to develop hypotheses and theoretical explanations based on my interpretations of what I observed (Johnson & Christensen, 2012; Sharma-Brymer & Fox, 2008). This choice made me adopt a “natural attitude” to the unreflective apprehension of the world as it is lived, precisely as it is encountered in everyday affairs (Wertz, 2005).

According to Ajjawi and Higgs (2007), human beings construct meanings in unique ways, depending on their context and personal frames of reference as they engage with the world they are interpreting. Consequently they need to be understood in their entirety within a situational context, not separated from the environments in which they function (Shepard, Schmoll, Hack & Gwyer, 1993).

The phenomenon I studied and which I report on here, is principals’ experience of different religion policies and of the mediating role they played in the implementation of these policies in their schools. Following Ajjawi and Higgs (2007), I first tried to understand the specific religious orientations of principals and to determine how these orientations were shaped while they were learners and young educators. Then I had to determine how they approached the implementation of religion in education policy in particular. I assumed that data collected on the first aspect – their religious orientations - would explain their allegiance to a specific

interest group when it came to policy implementation, and that the second aspect – their policy implementation approach – would help me understand the challenges in reconciling their own position with the positions of others.

The use of a phenomenological research design served this purpose. I was able to explore principals' experiences with further absorption and interpretation of collected data based on my theoretical and personal knowledge (Ajjawi & Higgs, 2007). At first I described the lived situations in which principals found themselves following this with the identification of general themes on the essence of the phenomenon. The aim of these attempts was to go beyond surface expressions or explicit meanings so as to access the implicit dimensions and intuitions (Finlay, 2009) of principals' experiences. In so doing, I entered into the so called "life worlds" of participating principals, uncovering the meaning structures of their lived experiences. I then described these, thereby gaining a deeper understanding of the nature and meaning of everyday mundane experiences of school principals who mediate or sub-contract policy implementation in schools (Cilesiz, 2008).

In following these steps I tried to see the world through the eyes of the principals, gaining a real understanding of the ways in which they construct reality. The phenomenological research design I used made principals richly humane, with each voice narrating and interpreting its own individual experiences. Recognition of the importance of lived experience, the narration of the subjective experiences, the registration of individually unique voices and the (re-) interpretation of meanings within those experiences provided me with the most suitable ground for locating principals' lived experiences. Interpreting such experiences meant honouring principals' words, meanings and voices (Sharma-Brymer & Fox, 2008). Understanding the very descriptions and experiences implied an understanding of their particular private and public spheres as well as their private religious lives which might possibly lie unexplored but ready for public understanding (Rogers, 1993).

4.3 Research method

As indicated earlier, the purpose of my study was to explore how school principals handled the implementation of religion policy in schools. Informed by this purpose, school principals constituted my research population since they are the ones with the richest information on issues underpinning my research questions.

For the purpose of this study, a school principal is someone who occupies a managerial position in a South African school regardless of whether the school is a secondary or primary school. Included in those who hold managerial positions in South African schools are principals, deputy principals, and school heads of departments. Bigger schools are entitled to appoint a principal, deputy principal, and one or more heads of department whereas smaller schools would have to suffice with a principal and one HoD. In my study all of these fall under the umbrella of school principals because they are all involved in school management. This is especially true in the absence of the principal, because the deputy (in a big school) or the HOD (in a small school) takes over the principal's job until he returns.

Other reasons for my decision to use school principals as my research population relate to the legal position and authority of school principals *vis a vis* school governing bodies. Firstly, in terms of the South African Schools Act (84 of 1996) all the managerial powers in the school are vested in the principal. Secondly, even though it is the role of the SGB to draft and adopt school policies, including the religion policy, research indicates that in most South African schools decisions regarding policy implementation remains in the hands of the principal. Thirdly, the majority of school principals in South Africa subscribe to particular religious views. Finally, all the principals are products of different South African religion policies and / or systems.

4.3.1 Sampling

Owing to the large and widely diverse South African landscape, and the research design I chose for my study it would not have been feasible to use the entire principal population as participants in this study. Therefore, having identified the research population, I selected a purposive sample (Patton, 1990) from the population of school principals. I regarded a purposive sampling strategy as the most appropriate sampling technique for a number of reasons. The first is that, since it is not the intention of the study to generalise findings, but rather to enhance understanding of principals' experiences of different religion policies as well as of their mediating role in implementing such policies in schools, purposive sampling was the answer. In selecting the sample the following criteria were used:

- The participant must have received management training at an advanced level to ensure that s/he would have at least been exposed to training on conflict management and resolution. For this reason I only used post-graduate students engaged in management training at post — graduate level

- Secondly, I had to include participants who have been in education for at least fifteen years to ensure that they would have been exposed to various religion in education policies
- Thirdly, I had to ensure that they were from various religious orientations, language and cultural groupings
- Fourthly, I wanted to get to their personal stories and not merely to what they perceive as government's expectations of them. Therefore I had to be able to interview them at a setting removed from their own school
- Lastly, race, gender, religion or urban/rural considerations were not used as criteria, but a deliberate attempt was made to be as inclusive as possible of the range of possibilities. Since more than 70% of people in South Africa belong to the Christian faith, it was expected that Christians would possibly also dominate the sample group.

It is important to mention that the necessary care was taken to present the views of the selected group, views that might or might not represent the views of all school principals in the country. The second reason is that, although statistics indicate that almost 75 per cent of the South African population subscribe to the Christian faith, only purposive sampling enabled me to include principals who represented other religious orientations, ensuring that I accommodated religious diversity in my sample. The third was that the use of purposive sampling made it possible for me to include in my sample school principals who were willing, available and accessible for participation.

My position as a foreign student posed serious challenges to my sampling strategy. Firstly, I did not have sufficient time and resources in the field to really get to know participants or to spend time in their work settings. However, the fact that principals in this study were participating in their private capacity, not as spokespersons of their schools, created a fair chance for every school principal to be part of this study. Considering feasibility in terms of financial cost and time, and the practical issues of accessibility, I decided to look into the possibility of using only school principals that were pursuing their postgraduate studies with the University of Pretoria in my sample in this study.

One of the advantages of including only postgraduate students in my sample was that their training could be assumed to have equipped them with the knowledge, skills, values and attitudes necessary for education management and leadership required in the teaching and learning of religion education as well as in the general implementation of religion policy in

schools. Another advantage was that I had to communicate with post-graduate students on a regular basis as part of my normal duties in the Faculty as a research assistant for post-graduate students. The students / principals thus knew me and could relate easily with me, especially since I was also a post-graduate student. In this sense I was not seen or experienced as an outsider. The invitation to participate in the research was therefore directed at identified principals engaged in post-graduate studies in the Department of Management, Law and Policy at the University of Pretoria. Gender, province, nationality were not considered as criteria neither did it matter whether they were in management positions at secondary or primary schools.

Although this approach brought me into contact with quite a number of school principals, not all of them could eventually be included in the sample: some did not honour appointments that were made and sometimes I had to wait for long periods without participants turning up for scheduled appointments. Because of the ethical principle which allows participants to withdraw from the study at any stage, I had to respect their choice not to be included. Secondly, my research approach required that I conducted more than one interview with each participant, i.e. with the principals in my sample, and this could not be realised in all cases. In the end, after a much longer period than originally anticipated, my sample consisted of 12 school principals, all studying towards their BEd (Hons), Master's or Doctoral Degrees at the University of Pretoria.

Table 4.1 provides a summary of the twelve school principals that participated in this study but, for ethical reasons pseudonyms are used to hide their identities. Although representation was not one of my requirements the principals involved represented a wide enough spectrum of geo-histories to benefit a study of this nature.

Table 4.1 Summary descriptions of school principals

Name ⁵	Province	School level	School location	Years' of experience	Gender	Race	Religious orientation
Sello	Limpopo	secondary	township	+15	male	black	African Traditional Christianity
Sipho	Limpopo	primary	Rural	+15	male	black	Christianity
Tom	Gauteng	secondary	City	+15	male	white	Christianity
Tefo	Limpopo	secondary & primary schools	Rural	+15	male	black	Christianity
Mark	Gauteng	secondary	City	+15	male	white	Christianity
Mpho	Mpumalanga Limpopo Gauteng	primary and secondary schools	Farm, rural, township	+15	male	black	Christianity
John	Gauteng	primary	township	+10	male	coloured	African Traditional Christianity
Nikiwe	Mpumalanga & Gauteng	secondary & primary schools	township	+20	female	black	Christianity
Neo	Mpumalanga	primary	township	+15	male	black	Christianity
Connie	Kwa-Zulu Natal	secondary	township	+15	female	coloured	Christianity
Gertrude	Kwa-Zulu Natal Gauteng	secondary	City	+15	female	Indian	Hinduism
Paul	Gauteng	secondary	city	+15	male	Indian	Hinduism Christianity Islam

In the next section I offer a brief overview of the school principals included in the sample. To honour my commitment to the anonymity promised to participants, pseudonyms are used to protect actual people and places.

4.3.2 School principals' religious profile

Sello, a black male, has served as a secondary school educator and principal in the semi-rural Limpopo province. He is what is often referred to as a “son of the soil” (meaning that he grew up in the area where he is now employed as principal). Although Sello was born and raised in a family that followed African traditional faith, he was educated at Christian schools where religious education was both a curriculum subject for all learners and an integral part of morning assemblies. He completed his secondary education in the same school where he later became a teacher and principal and was trained as an educator at a teacher training college where Biblical Studies was one of his major subjects. His school is in Lebowa, an area that was formerly part of a Bantustan. Although Indians and other ethnic groups are

⁵ Pseudonyms used to protect their identity

starting to move into the area for business purposes, the township remains exclusively black and the school continues to serve entirely black learners.

Sipho, also a black male was educated and trained in Christian faith-based institutions where religious education and Biblical Studies were regarded as the norm. The school day would commence with an assembly dedicated to Christian devotions. He started off his teaching career as a primary school educator and is now the deputy principal of a predominately black, semi-rural school in the Limpopo province. Lebowa, the area where his school is also situated was formerly part of a Bantustan. Although the school was surrounded by African Traditional communities, it remained Christian-based even after 1994.

Tom, a white male, has been a secondary school educator, deputy principal and principal in urban schools in the Gauteng province. He was schooled and trained in exclusively Afrikaans speaking Christian institutions where religious education and Biblical Studies were offered as part of the school curriculum. The school day would commence with an assembly that was dedicated to Christian devotions. Tom was an active member of Christian movements and became a Sunday school teacher at one stage.

Tefo, a black male, has been a secondary and primary school educator and principal in a semi-rural area in the Mpumalanga province. The schools where he taught served exclusively black learners mostly raised by single mothers. Tefo was educated and trained at institutions based on the Christian faith, with religious education and Biblical Studies being offered as compulsory subjects. Although believers in the African Traditions constituted the second largest group in the area, the schools continued to run the Christian way even after 1994. The area where the school is situated is Venda, also formally part of a Bantustan.

Mark, a white male, was schooled and trained at Christian-faith based institutions where the school day would start with Christian devotions. Although he was exposed to religions other than Christianity while pursuing his studies in London, he remained a Christian. Mark was first a secondary school educator and then a deputy principal in a multi-denominational, urban, Afrikaans speaking school in the Gauteng province. Although the school is predominantly populated with Afrikaans speaking learners, it also admits learners from Indian and other ethnic groups that have started to move into the formerly white suburb.

Mpho, a black male, was schooled and trained at Christian-faith based institutions where religious education and Biblical Studies were part of the curriculum. The school day would commence with an assembly that was dedicated to Christian devotions. The schools to which he was appointed as an educator are situated in KwaNdebele, formerly part of a Bantustan. During his teaching career he was a primary and a secondary school educator as well as a principal in semi-rural areas and townships in the Mpumalanga, Limpopo and Gauteng provinces. All these schools served exclusively black communities. Although learners subscribing to the African Traditional faith constituted the second largest group in the schools, Christian religious education remained the dominating faith even after 1994.

John, a coloured male, was schooled and trained in Christian-faith based institutions in Gauteng, in an area that was formerly part of the Department of Education and Culture. The schools served predominately black learners. Although religions such as Islam and Hinduism started to emerge because of the Indians that had started to move into the area, African belief in African traditions was the second largest faith in those communities. John was first a primary school educator and then a principal at township schools in the Gauteng province. The schools at which he taught in Gauteng retained the *status quo* even after 1994. Although it is common for Coloureds to belong to the Christian faith, it appeared as if John's family believed in African Traditions: this was evident from some marks made by traditional healers on his body as well as from his references to ancestral powers.

Nikiwe, a black female, was schooled and trained at Christian-faith based institutions where religious education and Biblical Studies formed part of the school programme. She served as a primary and secondary schools educator, HoD, deputy principal and principal in semi-rural areas and townships in the Mpumalanga and Gauteng provinces. The schools where she taught serviced black learners who belonged to different culture and had different religious orientations. However, Christian religious education prevailed even after 1994.

Neo, a black male was educated and trained at Christian-faith based institutions where religious education and Biblical Studies were compulsory subjects. He worked as a primary school educator and principal in townships in the Mpumalanga province. The schools serviced mainly black learners. Although there was an emergence of the Islam faith at the time he started his career, Christian religious education was the dominating faith.

Connie, a coloured female, was schooled and trained at Christian-faith based institutions that were formerly part of the Department of Education and Culture, House of Delegates designed for Coloureds only. She completed her secondary education at the same school where she later became an educator and deputy principal. Religious education and Biblical Studies were part of the school curriculum. She was later appointed as deputy principal at a secondary township school in the Eastern parts of Kwa-Zulu Natal where Christian religious education remained the dominating tradition even after 1994. The school serviced primarily coloured learners although there were also quite a few black learners in the school.

Gertrude, an Indian female, was born into the Hindu faith. She was educated and trained at Hindu-faith based institutions – institutions that were established only for Indians. Everything at the school was done in a Hindu way: they would celebrate Hindu festivals, and observe Hindu special days such as Diwali. Even though she was exposed to religions other than Hindu at tertiary level, she remained a Hindu. Gertrude served as an educator, HoD and deputy principal in Hindu, Christian and multi-faith secondary schools in townships and cities in the Kwa-Zulu Natal and Gauteng provinces.

Paul, an Indian male, was also born into the Hindu faith. He started his schooling at Hindu institutions where Hinduism was the norm. He completed his secondary education in a Christian-faith based school and observed Christian devotions with the other learners. He converted to Islam when he attended teacher training college. Paul was a secondary school educator and deputy principal at an urban school in the Gauteng province where Christianity was the dominating faith although it serviced learners from multiple religions and cultures.

Looking at the sample of participants described above, one realises that although they share the common experience of being principals who are pursuing their studies at the University of Pretoria, they are diverse in many interesting ways – their historic origins, religions, language, gender, and years of teaching and management experience. Since the main focus of this study was to understand how school principals experience different religion policies and how such experiences influence their implementation of religion policy in schools, their religious orientations was the theme around which this study revolved. Informed by the phenomenological frame of reference which is concerned with lived and felt experience, and which I used as basis for my research design, lived stories as told by principals are believed to be the most suitable source for an examination of their experiences.

It is important to note that a great deal of research has been done in South Africa on theoretical understandings of the concept, “religion in education”. However, none of the studies conducted thus far has attempted to enter the social world (ontology) and experiences of people expected to “stir the pot” – school principals. In none of these studies do we hear their voices nor learn about their concerns, hopes or dreams as people who are expected to implement the religion policy (Phillion, 2008). The implication is that a detailed examination of their policy experience has not as yet been given the necessary attention. Such experiences and information on the ways in which they have influenced principals’ decisions regarding the manner in which the religion policy should be implemented are critical to the formulation of guidelines on future planning and it is my contention that they are best accessed through the use of narratives, hence my study.

4.3.3 Narrative inquiry

In this study, I employed narrative inquiry as conceptualized in the works of Clandinin and Rosiek (2007), Connelly and Clandinin (2006) and Clandinin and Connelly (2000). They describe narrative inquiry as the study of experiences understood narratively. Put somewhat differently, narrative inquiry is a way of thinking about, and studying, experience. This is clear from Clandinin and Connelly’s (2000) definition of narrative inquiry as

*....a way of understanding experience. It is **collaboration** between the researcher and participants, over time, in a place or series of places, and in social interaction with the actual setting. An inquirer enters this matrix in the midst and progresses in the same spirit, concluding the inquiry still in the midst of living and telling, reliving and retelling, the stories of the experiences that make up people’s lives, both individual and social.*

A narrative is therefore a story about life and about how we construct meaning through the life experiences we have had. Authors attach different meanings to the concept “story(s)”. Some view stories as the oldest proven motivational tool that carries in it the shared culture, beliefs, and history of a particular group (Durrance, 1997). Others refer to storytelling as a basic communicative and meaning-making device pervasive to human experience (Merriam, 2009). Generally though, storytelling is a way of reflecting on our lives, by retelling and giving meaning to experiences we had in the form of a story.

The aim of my current study, informed as it is by my phenomenological design, is to collect fresh, complex, and/or rich descriptions of principals' experiences of the different religion policies as well as of their implementation – as these are lived, felt and undergone. It is through their narratives that principals hold and express their positive and negative past, positive and negative present and that which they come to refer to as their personal practical knowledge (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). I therefore considered narratives to be the tool that would bring me closest to the rawness of principals' experiences (Craig, 2009).

Coupled with inquiry, narratives serve as a vehicle by which a conversational relationship with school principals about the meaning of an experience could be developed. This is only possible, though, if the researcher reflects with the participants on the phenomenon in hand (Ajjawi & Higgs, 2007; Bruner, 2002; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). It was this perspective – narrative, as a mode of inquiry and a way of presenting principals' lived experiences in their own words – that formed the basis for the data collection method used in my study.

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) describe the tentative nature of narrative inquiry as follows:

As the researcher, I enter the field of enquiry living my own story. Principals in this study also came to the inquiry living their own stories. Their lives did not begin the day we meet for inquiry nor did they end as we departed – our lives continued. Furthermore, places in which principals live and work, their schools, their communities are also in the midst when I meet with them. Their landscapes in the broadest sense are also in the midst of narratives.

Although school principals in this study were participating in their private capacity, not as the spokespersons for their schools, I had to secure permission from the Faculty of Education to involve them in this study. Once permission had been granted, I had to extend invitations to principals in the B. Ed (Hons), Master's and Doctoral degree programmes through direct and/or e-mails contact. The invitations were directed at every school principal regardless of gender, province, historic origin and type of schools (secondary or primary) in which they worked. Some responded immediately; others requested time to think and responded at a later stage.

The next step was to negotiate and maintain relationships with participating school principals. Besides the fact that we had one thing in common, that we are post-graduate students at the same university, I also assisted them with various study issues in my capacity as faculty research assistant. I had been with most of them since Master's level, so they were aware that

I was not a South African. Moreover, I had indicated during the invitation that their participation was in a private capacity, not as spokespersons for their schools so they were sure that there was no way that either their schools or the department of education to which they were accountable would know of their participation. Once they had agreed to participate it was my role and responsibility to look for opportunities to meet with them, hence I approached faculty programme coordinators and supervisors to determine when the principals concerned would be on campus so that I could contact them to make appointments.

Although the initial plan was that the duration of each interview would be 30 to 43 minutes, this did not work out this way due to culturally embedded constraints: in the African tradition one cannot enter the world of another without following the proper social graces. These need not be explicitly stated as such and were not part of data gathering. Even so, they do provide some context hence their use needs to be mentioned. Each narrative inquiry began with short introductory questions about their “wellbeing”, the “wellbeing of the family”, and their “study progress” – as a useful way of negotiating (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Devers & Frankel, 2000). These questions helped to establish a relationship of trust and confidence between the participants and me, as a researcher, thereby creating a rapport between us early on in the data collection process, and giving me access into their religious worlds and thoughts.

Unlike other qualitative data collection techniques, narrative inquiry takes the form of a conversation where participants – principals, in my case – relate their experiences, bringing in whatever they consider to be relevant. As part of the introductory stage, I provided a brief summary of my study, highlighting the purpose, areas of research, and research focus of the whole interview process. In preparation for the interviews, I selected the theme and topics to explore, ordering and asking the research questions in my own words. In addition, in order for the above mentioned conversation to run its natural course, I allowed principals to recall and report their experiences and their role in religion policy implementation in the form of stories – narration schema (Jovchelovitch & Bauer, 2000).

The use of narration schema created a more relaxed and informal atmosphere for both the participant and the researcher. Although I adopted a narrative schema schedule, I could not altogether omit the question-answer schema from the interviews since I also needed demographic and other specific data which I wanted to use for the purpose of drawing comparisons across school principals’ experiences / narratives (Riessman, 1993). Follow-up

questions noted during the interviews were asked during moments when the principal concerned paused or signalled the end of the story.

In so doing, I enabled principals to best share their perspectives through their stories, using their own spontaneous words in the narration of events (Bates, 2004). The three-dimensional space thus created provided me with the liberty to characterise schools without dismissing principals' experiences or the centrality of their relationships and interactions to the flow of events in the educational enterprise (Craig, 2003). Since the experiences were simultaneously social and personal the creation of a three-dimensional space also gave me insight into each experience as it occurred in time and space. My role at this point in time was to restrict myself to attentive and active listening with non-verbal signals (Mm..., yes...), avoiding as much as I could any interruption in the flow of the narration.

Still, this mode of behavior posed a serious challenge on my side as I could not refrain from playing a leading role or interfering with their stories. When this happened, I kept on searching for a deeper understanding and interpretation by asking multiple but related questions at various stages during the interview (e.g. is this what you said, did you say this, what did you mean by this...?). The other challenge, which also manifested during the interview process, was that of the terminology used in different religions. I also used to constantly ask for clarification and spell checked some of the terms during the transcription stage.

As the inquiry process continued and principals started to warm up, their stories unfolded. They recalled their schooling, their parents' interests in religious activities, and their involvement in the choice of schools, college education, and religious devotions at assembly, in the school curriculum, as a subject choice and in religious organisations. They could remember the years when they entered the teaching profession, with continual reference being made to their religious education experiences. They went on to reflect on the time when the new government came into power (1994) and the changes this brought about – religious changes in particular – their reactions and responses to the changes as well as the reactions and responses of colleagues, parents and learners. The release of the religion policy in 2003, how their principals, or even some of them at the time, dealt with the situation in individual schools, change of schools, provinces, positions, moving from primary to secondary schools, school sizes, and their viewpoints of religion policy, all were recalled during the course of the interviews.

The whole episode reflected the three-dimensional space of Clandinin and Connelly (2000), which Schuetze (1977), as cited in Bauer (1996), calls the “inherent demands of narration”, and which other scholars call “story schema or narrative conventions” modelled as “story grammar” (Johnson & Mandler, 1980) once they start. In simpler terms, this means that principals’ narratives became their on-going temporality as they moved between different educational policies, as they recalled their interaction with colleagues, learners, parents and departments of education, and as they reflected on situations and places where these changes were brought about. My role as the inquirer was to respect the self-interpretive reflective space they needed in order to provide the text (Wertz, 2005). I therefore listened attentively when stories flew around in a “self-generating schema”, transiting from one event to another, accounting for time, place, motives, and points of orientation, plans, strategies and abilities (Jovchelovitch, Sandra, Bauer & Martin, 2000). At this stage my role was to probe where necessary, and/or to guide them through the various stages of the interview. I supplemented the data gathered with field notes made during inquiries because my most important aim was to capture each principal’s voice (Wolcott, 2001).

It is also an African tradition that one cannot leave the world of another without proper social graces that express gratitude and appreciation. This also needs to be stated as such, and not as part of the data. After the interviews I switched off the tape recorder and thanked participants for their time, effort and, above all, for the information provided. It was then that I wrapped up our conversation with a brief and careful explanation of the nature of the study. This enabled us (the participant and the researcher) to discuss my interpretation of the interview, which the participant felt free to accept, correct or to reject. In a more relaxed mood than during the interviews, I realised that the most interesting discussions came up at that stage. I therefore used to note down such additional information as and when it seemed useful for contextual interpretations. Doing this contributed significantly to the elimination of any misconceptions principals might have had about the study as well as to the reaching of consensus in discussions where the credibility of interview data was an important criterion.

4.3.4 Narrative analysis

Drawing on the characteristics of phenomenological research design, the previous sub-section outlined the process in which researcher and participants engaged as a way of laying down their experiences, the narratives of which were audio-taped. During the interviews, some participants were elaborate and quite articulate while others halted, reflected, paused and

were much more concise in their telling. Consequently some interviews were lengthy while others were not. This presented me with a challenge when I started re-constructing the text for the reader.

One of the merits of the phenomenological approach is that its use generates descriptions that are rich and evocative, invoking in readers the *phenomenological nod* in recognition of a phenomenon so richly described that they too may have experienced it (Ajjawi & Higgs, 2007). With this as my point of departure I set down the concrete descriptions of principals' lived experiences, often first-person accounts, in their everyday words, avoiding abstract intellectual generalisation (Finlay, 2009). I did transcriptions myself in order for me to get a grip on the material (Bauer, 1996). Body language, facial expressions, and gestures were attended to in the form of field notes. An old adage says, "I know what I've said, but I'm not sure if what I meant is what you have heard and understood". For this reason, I sent transcriptions to participants for correction of errors of fact and to ensure that I have represented them and their ideas accurately (Mertler, 2006).

Upon receiving the returned transcriptions from principals, I followed the precise data analysis procedures developed from phenomenological principles and guidelines on systematic and useful ways of interpreting data. The aim of phenomenological data analysis is to transform a lived experience into a textual expression of its essence, in such a way that the effect of the text is at once a reflexive re-living and a reflective appropriation of something meaningful (Ajjawi & Higgs, 2007; Connelly & Clandinin, 2006). Hunter (2010) asserts that once words are out as written text, they become a story. People become texts; texts become the voice that provides a human link that bonds together participants' words and the writings of the researcher to provide the reader with an effective experience (Sharma-Brymer & Fox, 2008). Van Manen (1990), as cited in Sharma-Brymer and Fox (2008), acknowledges that texts may be what was not said or written while still being "generally acknowledged truths".

It is normal practice for human beings to use their own experience to interpret and understand the world around them. However, allowing too much of a natural attitude is likely to manipulate and distort the results of the study. For this reason I put aside my preconceived approach to everyday living as informed by culture and education as well as my past experience of religious education – i.e. I adopted the "phenomenological attitude" (Holroyd, 2001; Wertz, 2005). In doing so, I was able to gain a deeper understanding of principals'

experiences of different religion policies and of how they dealt with the implementation of these. The six steps for analysing narratives proposed by Schütze (1977, 1983), in Jovchelovitch and Bauer (2000), formed the basis for my narrative analysis in this study.

First, principals' recorded stories of narrative interviews were transcribed shortly after they were collected. Secondly, individual transcriptions were analysed in terms of the initially identified categories. These included principals' past and present positive and negative experiences of different religion policies as well as the management strategies they employed in dealing with these policies in schools.

Secondly, using the WEFT Qualitative Analysis programme, I coded the data in terms of these categories, identifying what Schütze called indexical statements that refer to 'who did what, where, when and why', as well as non-indexical material which go beyond events and express values, judgements and any other form of generalised 'life wisdom'. During this process, I paid special attention to those descriptive statements that explained how events were "lived", "felt" and "narrated", the values and opinions attached to them, as well as to the usual and the ordinary. Argumentative statements were also attended to in order to legitimise what was not taken for granted in the stories and reflections in terms of general theories and concepts about the events.

The third step involved the use of indexical components of the text, i.e. the ordering of individual events. As I went on reading and reflecting on each participant's text, drawing the summary of what I initially highlighted, patterns – temporal / spatial themes (past, present and future context) – emerged across all the narrative (Nieuwenhuis, 2007; Creswell, 2007; Sharma-Brymer & Fox, 2008). This helped me recognise the kind of collective outcomes that Schütze calls trajectories. The non-indexical components were investigated through "knowledge analysis" in the fourth step. It was at this stage that different trajectories which illuminated deeper lying assumptions, values, and beliefs of principals manifested.

I then used those opinions, concepts, and general theories, reflections and separations between the usual and the unusual as the basis on which I constructed operative theories, comparing them with narrative elements, since they represented the self-understanding of school principals regarding their own role and that of others in the process of religion policy implementing (Nieuwenhuis, 2007; Schütze, 1977, 1983).

As a fifth step I clustered and compared principals' individual trajectories. This led me to the final step, at which time I used a cross-trajectory analysis to identify similarities and differences between principals' narratives. Because the emphasis of the study was on the content of a text, "what" is said, more than on "how" it is said, the "told" rather than the 'telling' (Riessman, 2003), having established similarities and differences between codes, I established emerging patterns. I grouped related patterns or categories together and developed these into themes at a later stage. I further developed themes by comparing what I had with insights from literature (see Chapter 2) on resistance to change, mediation and sub-contracting.

4.4 Trustworthiness

According to Mertler (2006), trustworthiness refers to the accuracy and believability of data. In this study trustworthiness is the degree in which other practitioners, researchers, scholars and / or educationists turn to, rely or will rely on, and use the concepts, methods, and inferences used in the study as the basis of their own theorising, research and / or practice (Craig, 2009). In other words, trustworthiness was used as a criterion against which data analysis, findings and conclusions (Nieuwenhuis, 2007) could be assessed as they occurred in this study. The aim of establishing trustworthiness being to ensure that research findings are worth paying attention to (Lincoln & Guba, 2000), I made absolutely sure that I adhered to the methodological norms of narrative research (as described below). I also ensured that each narrative satisfied the criteria of credibility, thick description, conformability, and auditing, criteria used by all qualitative researchers, including those who do narrative research.

According to Denzin (1989a), narratives are fictional statements that, to a varying degree, are about real lived lives. It was Bruner (1986) who first drew the distinction between a life as lived, a life as experienced, and a life as told. A life lived is what actually happened. A life experienced is one comprised of images, feelings, sentiments, desires, thoughts, and meanings known to the person whose life it is. A life told is a narrative or several narratives influenced by the cultural conventions of telling, by the audience, and by the social context. In theory, a life that is lived, experienced, and told about should therefore depict a complete relationship between these three elements. In real life, however, there are inevitable gaps between reality, experience, and expression.

The key elements of life stories are facts, facilities, and fiction. *Facts* refer to events that are believed to have *occurred*, *facilities* to the *way(s)* in which those facts were lived and experienced by the interacting individuals, and *fiction* to the *truthfulness* of the narrative concerned. The kind of fiction emerging from the telling is therefore a narrative that not only deals with facts and facilities but is also faithful to them both. This makes the narrative true and therefore trustworthy.

Recording and analysing stories about remembered events and about how these were experienced are what narrative research is all about. The stories that emerge from narrative research, however, consist not of three, but of four levels, according to Goodson (1992a). The life lived is told by the *person* who lived and experienced it, school principals, in this case. It is then retold when the principal (storyteller) and the researcher collaborate to produce an inter-subjective understanding of the narrative. According to Goodson (1992a), the relationship between life as lived, life as experienced and life as told and rendered in text is therefore distinctive. Within this frame of reference it follows that all those participating in the collaborative process of collecting and producing narratives – i.e. I, as the researcher, as well as the participating principals, had to remove ourselves from the real lived event that was the starting point for the story being told.

4.4.1 Credibility

Lincoln and Guba (2000) describe credibility as the result of an evaluation that has as purpose determining whether or not the research findings represent a *credible* conceptual interpretation of the data drawn from the participants' original data. To address the issue of credibility in this study, I employed the following techniques.

To assure the quality of my research findings, I first considered the *consistency* of the findings by using two criteria, namely *rigor and credibility* as conceptualized by Ajjawi and Higgs (2007). As indicated earlier, I used the phenomenological approach as frame of reference for my research design. Since phenomenological designs require systematic methods of data collection and analysis, transparency in documenting these methods and consistency in operating within the assumptions and traditions of the research paradigm and design (Lincoln & Guba, 2000), my design complied with the criterion of rigor. Secondly, I identified several strategies in literature on research methodology that could enhance rigor in interpretive research. These included congruence between the adopted research paradigm and

chosen methods, prolonged engagement with participants through the phenomena, audio taped records and field notes.

Third, in striving to achieve the aims I set myself for this study, I collected data over a period of 4-5 months. During this period, and even before, I had established rapport with the participants and gained their trust. This made them feel comfortable and gave them the freedom to openly share their views and religious experiences with me, hence increasing the rigor and credibility of the stories as well as my interpretation of such experiences (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006).

4.4.2 *Thick description*

To ensure that my stories provided "thick descriptions" of principals' experiences I not only composed field texts but also drafted, redrafted and shared interim research texts with participants (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). This assisted me in ensuring that I did not exclude anything that would convey the "living" of principals' experiences. In doing so I also ensured the transparency of the whole research process. The recursive, reflective and reflexive nature of this process brought to light, amongst others, that my being in the field made me the main instrument for data collection and analysis in this study. It also showed that, with our lived experiences at the forefront during all the stages of the research, I was not a distant, detached person; instead, I sometimes became too passionate about understanding principals' experiences of different religion policies and the role(s) they played in the implementation of these policies in schools, so I was fully engaged in the whole process or, as Phillion (2008) would have said, I "invested" in their stories.

The widely diverse sample of principals included in this study played an important role in ensuring the trustworthiness of the study. Ensuring that all our voices – mine as well as those of the participating principals – would be heard in the text, and the act of placing my subjectivity at the fore ground to separate what belonged to me as the researcher from that which belonged to the researched, also enhanced the authenticity of my study (Lincoln & Guba, 2000).

The use of rich descriptions and the inclusion of participants' words, thus allowing them to speak for themselves where possible, further validate the authenticity of the narratives included in my study. In describing in depth the contexts within which principals experienced different religion policies and played out their role as policy implementers I collected enough

empirical evidence to construct descriptions that were “thick” enough to be regarded as rigorous, credible and trustworthy.

Finally, I framed my descriptions and interpretations in theory, using theories on resistance, mediation and sub-contracting to construct an articulate persuasive argument validated by empirical evidence, and reflecting an understanding of principals’ experiences – as expressed in lived, felt and told stories of different religion policies and of the role/s they consider themselves to have played in policy implementation.

4.4.3 *Conformability and auditing*

Conformability refers to the measure of how well the research findings are supported by the data collected (Lincoln & Guba, 2000). The data and the interpretations presented in my study were not allusions to my own experiences, beliefs, thoughts and perceptions, but to those of school principals who participated in the study. Being quite aware that I could influence the interviews to a certain extent, thereby making all interpretations subjective, I kept on searching for a deeper understanding and interpretation by asking multiple but related questions at various stages during the interview (e.g., “Is this what you said, did you say this, what did you mean by this...?”). I also constantly asked for clarification and spell checked the terminology used in different religions during the transcribing stage. Towards the end of every interview, when the recorder had been switched off, I used to engage participants in discussions where they were free to accept, correct or to reject my interpretation of the interview. Together, these techniques assisted me in harnessing my own subjectivity in favour of authentically presenting the experiences of participating principals.

Auditing is described as a procedure where a third party examiner systematically reviews the audit trail maintained by me as the researcher (Schwandt, 2007). In my study, the raw data (tape recorded interviews), interview transcripts, interview guides, list of participants and their profiles, as well as my field notes were audited by my mentor throughout the study period to validate their accuracy and authenticity.

In addition to the above, I sent transcriptions to participants, asking them to correct errors of fact. This served to ensure that I represented them and their ideas accurately (Mertler, 2006). Finally, my study went through the program called “turn-it-in” as per the university’s requirement to ensure its originality.

4.5 Ethical considerations

The current study was conducted with people, school principals, to be specific. It was therefore imperative that their well-being should be my top priority in the study. Invitations requesting their participation were done in writing (See Annexure “C”) as was their informed consent. Participating principals were also provided, in writing, with the following:

- A detailed description of what the study was about (the purpose of the study)
- My data collection strategy
- What would be expected of them, including the amount of time they would have to spend ‘participating’
- An assurance that their lessons would not be interrupted
- The assurance that they were participating in their private capacity, not as spokespersons of their schools
- The fact that participation was voluntary and that they could withdraw at any time with no negative repercussions
- An explanation of how confidentiality and anonymity would be protected, and
- My name and my contact details as well as those of my study supervisor / mentor.

A letter requesting permission to have students (principals) participate in this study, in the same format as the one described above, was also sent to the Dean of the Faculty of Education at the University of Pretoria (see Annexure “A”). Copies of informed consent from participants as well as a letter requesting permission from the Dean accompanied my Ethics application form, which had to be submitted to the Ethics Committee of said Faculty.

It needs to be noted that ethical considerations are a prerequisite to all qualitative research studies. It appeared to be of prime importance throughout inquiry process due to its relational nature. I therefore regarded it as my responsibility to move beyond the phrase of “do no harm” and to learn how to listen empathically, i.e. to listen without being judgmental and to suspend my disbelief (Clandinin & Murphy, 2007) as I attended to principals’ stories. I increasingly understood the relational responsibilities as long term, that is, as attentive to my life as well as to theirs – while the inquiry was taking place, while research texts were written, and while our lives continued to unfold into the future (Huber, Clandinin & Huber, 2006).

Great care was taken to protect the identities of participants in anything that was seen and said by them in this study, with the understanding that their lived and told stories are who

they are and who they are becoming and that these stories sustain them. With such understanding in mind, I was able to apply the necessary skills to negotiate research texts that respectfully represented principals' lived and told stories. The data they provided as well as the data I collected through observation was handled and reported in such a way that it could not be associated with them personally. In doing so, I created a space where their narrative authority was honored.

I came to consider issues of anonymity and confidentiality to be of prime importance as the complexity of principals' lives were uncovered, hence I used strategies such as fictionalising and blurring identities and places (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) to ensure that they would not be recognised and that my pledge of confidentiality would not be broken. I coded the data obtained and kept a separate file with the code linked to unique identifying information. No uniquely identifying information was attached to the data, thus no one would be able to trace it back to the individual who provided it. The raw data, transcriptions, and field notes are stored in the Department of Education Management and Policy Studies, Faculty of Education, University of Pretoria for a period not longer than 15 years.

4.6 Conclusion

Chapter 4 serves both as a summary of and an orientation to the research design and methodology which I used in this study. My research design, as described in this chapter was meant to be used like a road map in that it had to direct me, the researcher, towards my research destination. More importantly, though, the design was aimed at orientating the audience, readers of this study, to the whole process.

To achieve this dual purpose, I stated up front (a) what it was that I wanted to research, (b) why I chose that area of study in particular, and (c) how I planned to investigate / research the chosen area of study. I discussed and justified my selection of a qualitative research approach as the most suitable research approach for this study. I also explained what a phenomenological research design entailed and justified its adoption for my research purpose.

Having covered the technical aspects of my research design I gave an overview of narrative inquiry as the most applicable data collection method for my study. Purposive sampling, its merits and the sample of principals participating in my study were also discussed in this chapter as were the following: narrative analysis, steps taken to ensure the credibility and trustworthiness of my research findings, the importance of research ethics and what I did to

ensure that my study was ethical. In the next chapter, Chapter 5, I present and interpret participating principals' narratives. In essence, therefore, Chapter 5 contains my research findings.

CHAPTER 5

RESEARCH FINDINGS

5.1 Introduction

In this, the penultimate chapter of my research report I present the results of my study. As indicated in Chapters 1 and 4, the purpose of my study was to describe not only principals' experience of various religion in education policies but also the way in which they experienced the role(s) they had to play in implementing some of these. In accordance with the tenets of narrative research, which I discussed in Chapter 4, I had to 'enter' their life worlds in order to fully understand these experiences. Assuming that their past experiences, as learners and teachers, may have had a significant influence on their current experiences, I had to describe both, starting with their memories of religion in education from childhood to the present, indicating how these may have shaped the way in which they have dealt with and still deal with the implementation of religion policy in their schools. In doing so I had to acknowledge the connection between their private lives, i.e. between the personal and biographical aspects of their careers, indicating how these have intersected to shape their professional thoughts and actions to date (Day *et al.* 2007).

Lived space, as a phenomenological descriptive concept, provided me with a construct within which I could elaborate on principals' experiences in order to reach a new understanding (Sharma-Brymer & Fox, 2008) of what they were going through. Put differently, principals' stories, as told by them, in their own words, bring order and meaning to the lives they were telling me about. In a way, through the told stories, I was able to better understand not only their past and present but also the legacy they might leave behind (Rosenwalt & Ochberg, 1992). The principals' stories gave me a vantage point from which I could observe what they were experiencing. In the course of my observations I gradually began to identify the threads that connected one part of their lives to another (Latta & Kim, 2010; Lyons, 2010), from childhood to adulthood (Lemmer, 2009; Johnson & Colombeck, 2002). It was this process which led to my own, subjective understanding of their lived experiences.

My role as researcher was to record, analyze, and interpret principals' told stories with a view not only to uncover the underlying narratives which they themselves might not have been able to give voice to but also to decipher the hidden meanings in the apparent meanings

(Nieuwenhuis, 2007), and then to use these as basis for the conclusions I drew about their life worlds. I present my findings in the following manner. First I narrate the past, positive and negative religious experiences of school principals, weaving my own understanding of what they were not saying into their telling. Then I draw conclusions about ways in which their past experiences of religion in education might have influenced their current thoughts about and implementation of religion policies which differ from those to which they were accustomed. Finally, based on insights I gained from listening to and analysing participating principals' narratives, as well as from my interpretation of their telling, I present my conclusions about the effect that their experiences might have had on the way they perform their professional roles in the area of policy implementation.

5.2 Non-Christian principals' narratives

Two of the participating principals, Gertrude and Paul, subscribed to the Hindu religion⁶ at some time or other. In recording their experiences I first tell Gertrude's and then Paul's story. Having done so, I identify the similarities and differences between the two before drawing my own conclusions about the influence that their respective experiences with Hinduism might have had on their mediation of religion in education implementation.

5.2.1 Gertrude's story

Gertrude told me that she was born and raised in a Hindu community in the Kwa-Zulu Natal province. She was educated in institutions designed for Indians, primarily Indians who were also Hindus. Her school day typically started with assembly where Hindu devotions were followed. Religious lessons were also offered as part of the school curriculum. She mentioned that, even though in some cases the school community was composed of Hindus and Muslims, she did not experience challenges as they were from the same area and shared *one culture*. According to her, there were no changes in terms of her religious experience when she moved on to a secondary school because again they followed *one religion* where the school would start with a prayer - they would also sing - and go to class, just as they did at primary school. They celebrated the *same religious festivals* and were *never exposed to other religions*.

⁶ Less than 1% of the total population of South Africa belong to the Hindu faith and 1.5% to the Muslim faith

It was only when she started her studies as a teacher that her religious world expanded since the university where she enrolled *did not subscribe to a particular religion: it was a multi-faith* institution. This, Gertrude claimed, was her *first exposure* to people from different religions, an exposure that, to some extent, tested her faith because, although she was a member of a Hindu group that used to meet on campus and celebrate festivals, she felt that she would *like joining the Christian group* but, *as there was no open invitation, this was difficult*. She also mentioned that it was at this stage where she pursued her talent for playing the piano while simultaneously learning *Christian music* because she began *playing in Christian congregations on Sundays*, thereafter her father would drive her to the Hindu temple for her religious orientation. Moreover, she made herself available as a pianist *for Christian celebrations and weddings*. Gertrude believed that it was her experience as a pianist which gave her greater exposure to Christianity than other people who had never been in Christian-faith based schools before would have had.

Gertrude's teaching career took off in a secondary school in a city in the Kwa-Zulu Natal province before 1994. The school essentially operated in a Hindu way but, since Muslims were also part of the school community, both religions and orientations (i.e. Divali) were acknowledged and observed as was the case when she was at school as a child. Gertrude's next post, however, was in a Christian-based secondary school in Durban.

After 1994, Gertrude was appointed in a senior position at a Christian-oriented secondary school in the Gauteng province - *the first educator of colour*. One thing she clearly remembers about her interview for the post was that she was told that she would have to teach *Bible Studies as a subject* to learners in the school. This did not upset her equilibrium at all because, according to her, she was secure in her faith. Her decision to accept the post was primarily pragmatic: she *needed a job ... in the Gauteng province*. She knew that she was *a good teacher* and she was prepared *to teach anything, even ... another religion*. Neither was she scared that she or her children would have to give up their own religion in favour of Christianity even though she knew that her children were going to get *a Christian education*. Acknowledging the risks involved she was determined to *work hard as a parent to reinforce their Hindu education at home*. Also, since she did not regard herself as a missionary for Hinduism she at no stage even considered using her position at the schools to convert other learners to her faith.

Her only worry was that she was scared of teaching Christian learners *wrong things - misinterpret the Bible or have the wrong person or the wrong verse*. According to her, that area stressed her so much that even though she was not a Christian, she went out of her way to ensure that she provided them with quality lessons. She would pick up the Bible, study it like she studied at school and teach the learners what it said. Because of this attitude, she indicated, she secured the trust of parents who, although they suspected that she was a Hindu - *you could hardly get an Indian Christian* - never once complained about anything that she taught. She believed that what made her teaching and learning of Biblical Studies a success was the fact that she focussed on her job, teaching what she was supposed to, and nothing else.

In 2001 Gertrude moved to a multi-cultural, urban school in the Gauteng province where, five years later, she was promoted to a managerial post. It was in this position that she was faced with the task of treating these different cultures equally in terms of religious observances. According to Gertrude, the school's approach was to disallow the mentioning of any specific god during assembly. However, different religions were observed at different times of the day and that was the only time when everyone was free to observe his own religion. For instance, *Jewish* learners observe their religion in the morning, *Christians* at break time, and *Muslims* after school.

Assemblies were, however, used to celebrate different religious festivals. On occasions like these, and when there was an important occasion to celebrate, learners and staff were allowed to wear their unique religious outfits and because of this, *no one feels threatened in any way*. Moreover, school assemblies on Wednesdays are used to focus on specific themes. It is during these assemblies that religious leaders, parents or an educator knowledgeable about a particular religion is afforded the opportunity to speak to all learners and educators about a particular religion paying attention to the fact that 'no particular god is mentioned'. Gertrude has, however, seen to it that the time and manner of religion education lessons take cognizance of learners' age and level of religious understanding: learners from ages 6 to 10 are instructed by means of formal religion education lessons while older learners are given the opportunity to learn about other religions from performances at the assembly. Gertrude summarised this experience with religion as follows:

That's what is very different with the way we were brought up and schools that we attended where we would generally stay with people that are common to us with similar background, but, not in my current

school. I mean, it is a very inter-religious community and the good thing is that, learners inviting each other over for different religious occasions. Thus, they call each other for Ramadan or for Hindu festivals.

Regarding parents' role in the teaching of religion education, Gertrude stressed that parents seem to be relying on schools to reinforce individual religions to children (religious instruction). She told me that parents do not seem to understand that religious instruction is the responsibility of the family and that the role(s) of the school is to teach about the general aspects of particular religions.

...not many parents teach their children about religion and I even don't know if they are going to church, temples or re-enforcing the values. That is where parents are lacking at the moment. I would say that because they rely a lot on the school. Religion brings lots of values, customs and traditions; I am wondering whether it's happening with most parents.

In her school, according to Gertrude, the curriculum of the school in terms of *religion education is the responsibility of the head of academics and academic coordinator* while the crafting of school policies and everything performed on the school premises relating to religion has to be sanctioned by the departmental head office. Such *decisions are not discussed with parents*. Parents are given the mandate of the school during orientation sessions at the beginning of the year and, if they are against the mandate they are free to take their children to a school where their particular religion is offered.

Gertrude wrapped up her narrative by indicating that she still questions the implementation of religion policy in schools since in practice Christian religious education is still the dominant religion in most South African schools. She also mentioned that what shocks her most is the fact that even the provincial Departments of Education still open meetings with a Christian prayer yet expect schools to perform differently. Such practices make her lose the hope for a different approach that she gained from her current school.

5.2.2 Paul's story

Although he was an Islam follower at the time of the study, Paul, a male Indian principal was born and grew up in a Hindu community in Kwa-Zulu Natal. He spent most of his childhood participating in Hindu festivals and celebrations and that is where he learned more about the language and culture of his religion. He also enjoyed the legacy of being educated in those institutions that were designed for Indians, most of whom were Hindus. In narrating his past religion policy experience, Paul recalled the moments when he attended temple classes which

basically followed the normal schooling hours. It is in such lessons where they learnt *about the language, and of course, Hindu culture*. Paul remembered the days when, as Hindu communities, they would celebrate festivals together, eat and get to know one another better. In doing so, they *established that strong bond of relationship amongst Hindu communities*. It was in such gatherings and celebrations where Paul *observed some disparities amongst Hindu communities as well as between religions*.

Paul viewed and experienced Hinduism to be a religion for wealthy people even though his own family was not at all rich. He said, “Yah..., I think as a Hindu, you live depending on your wealth, your belongings and the amount of time you have to concentrate on the religion. This influenced the way one lived because when I was young, we did not have money, we did not have things and everyday was a struggle.” As he described his experience in this regard, one could pick up on those *sad moments* from his voice, as he took a deep breath, and from his face. I then offered him a glass of water and paused to allow him to reflect for a moment. He recalled that he attended Hindu ceremonies and festivals not only for religious purposes but also for the *lot of food* served at religious Hindu events. He also enjoyed attending certain prayer meetings where he enjoyed lots of sweet refreshments and the sorts of things that Hindu people would prepare.

On the negative side of the coin Paul recalled moments when they were forced to attend some Hindu activities, failing which they had to be punished. He also remembered the times when they would *punish us for things that you didn't know*. Such experiences influenced Paul's conversion to Christianity when he went to high school. His perception and experience of Christianity was positive in the sense that, according to him, Christians possessed healing powers, something which gave them a certain status in the community. Paul showed his commitment to Christianity first by attending church services, which were compulsory, and then by becoming a *Sunday school member and youth leader ... engaged in Christian teachings to young children*.

When he went to college to study teaching, Paul met a Muslim girl with whom he fell in love and eventually married. He then changed religions again, becoming a Muslim like his wife. The fact that Paul could change religion so easily would logically make him the most likely person to promote religious tolerance.

Paul joined the teaching profession as an educator in a Christian-oriented secondary township school in the Gauteng province before 1994. Although he was a Muslim at the time he

entered the profession, he did not experience the same hardships as his non-Christian colleagues in terms of Christian practices, perhaps because he was familiar with the Christian ethos, so he just fitted in. Soon afterwards, but before the religion policy could be released, he was appointed to a managerial position in a Christian-based, ex-Model C secondary city school in the Gauteng province - the *first member of colour* in the school management team. His multi-faith experience (as a Hindu, Christian and Muslim), according to him, stood him in good stead when the national religion policy was released: for the first time in his life he felt valued, if only because the principal used to consult him for advice and suggestions relating to the implementation of this policy. Paul on the other hand, would also approach the principal in cases where he noticed some pitfalls in this regard.

This notwithstanding, the implementation of religion policy in Paul's schools has never been smooth sailing. According to him, morning assemblies, which were the responsibility of the school principal, were always run the Christian way. Even though the attendance of such devotions was not a problem for him he became very sensitive towards such practices because, being a Muslim, he felt that they were being forced to practice Christianity while they were not afforded the opportunity to observe their own religions and that, according to him, constitutes *religious intolerance*. Paul was also denied permission to go to mosque on Fridays in most cases. He reported that such hardships were also experienced by his daughter in almost all the Christian-faith based schools she attended. On the other hand, Paul puts the blame on the Department of Education which, he claims, tends not to be serious about the implementation of the policy.

The department officials are scared to approach schools that do not tolerate other religions because they are powerful schools, and they get good results. Religious tolerance becomes a problem in so many schools because once again, the department does not give these schools a hard time about it, they do not make sure that the policy is properly implemented.

5.2.3 Similarities and differences in non-Christian principals' experiences

The number of non-Christian principals is by far too small to draw any general conclusions, but their experiences seems to suggest some similarities and differences in the way in which they viewed and experienced different religion policies both in their personal and professional lives.

5.2.3.1 Similarities

Both principals grew up in Hindu communities and spent their primary school education in Hindu-faith based schools under the control and administration of the House of Delegates where they related most with people from the same religion / culture. A confrontation with moments where Christianity was in the majority has never been a threat to these principals. Letting alone the fact that Paul gave up Hinduism even before he started teaching, he indicated that, because of his many religious conversions he was not at all uncomfortable with the Christian situation in his school. The same applied to Gertrude who indicated that she felt capable and appreciated both by parents and Christian community at large. They both experienced first-hand' what it felt like to be the first senior member of religions other than Christianity in Christian-faith based schools in Gauteng.

5.2.3.2 Differences

The way in which Gertrude, a female Hindu principal, experienced her Hinduism was very different from Paul's. Her memories of the days when *assemblies were run in the Hindu way* were positive. "So, basically in the mornings we used to sing, pray and have religion lessons during school. We all sang songs that belonged to more or less the same religion. It was much easier because it was not a multi-cultural school as all of us were around the same area. Besides, the other religion would be Islam as we attended the same schools. So we were never exposed to different religions besides those two, yes because we belonged to the same nationality, it was good and easy".

When Gertrude went to university there was no specific religious education [offered] because "we belonged to different religious groups". However, "we were a Hindu group that used to meet on campus and celebrated festivals". This was not, however, as pleasant an experience as the one she had when still at school because, according to Gertrude, other religious groupings, with different ways of celebrating their faiths, would also meet, each on its own spot on campus, thereby "disconnecting" one group from the other. This made Gertrude feel somewhat isolated from people of other religions. Her experience in this regard differs from Paul's. Whereas Gertrude and, so it would seem, some members of her Hindu group actually wanted to become part of the Christian group but could not - "We would feel like we could join the Christian group, but, we couldn't because there wasn't any open invitation" – Paul claims that he had no desire to mix with those of other religions.

At that time, you know you do not make friends with people from different religions. I was young and there were so many religions around, but I did not really understand or learn to associate with people from different religions. A lot of associations, I think come with being in a certain religion.

According to Gertrude, her desire to join a Christian group could be ascribed to her *upbringing*. “I was liberal in the sense because I used to listen to pastors and to play the piano for Christians’ congregation on Sunday after which my father would pick me up and take me to the temple for worship”. Acknowledging to herself that she wanted or needed to join a Christian group caused a shift in Gertrude’s personal consciousness and self-perception.

Paul’s primary religious experience, although Hindu, reflected the experiences of Christian principals: like most of them Paul subscribed to his religion from an early age. He recalled the times he *attended temple classes* but, unlike the Bible education classes his Christian counterparts attended, the “temple classes” were not so much about faith and the knowledge of religious texts but were basically about learning the language and of course, Hindu culture. Also, these classes were not part of the school curriculum. “We were also attending the normal school and that would then mean that I would attend temple classes after school.” Paul remembered the days when, as Hindu communities, they would celebrate festivals together where they would eat and get to know one another. In doing so, they established binding human relationship in and amongst communities.

There were functions in the community that we would attend. Then we would learn more about our religion. There were also certain religious events that we would spend a little more time at because it was more of getting together, more food and family.

According to Paul, it was in gatherings and celebrations like these where he first observed some inequalities amongst Hindu communities as well as between religions. This, in conjunction with the punishments and the fact that temple classes were conducted outside school hours made his Hindu experience a negative or unpleasant one.

Well it was not that of a good experience because you know, our religious cultures are not very nice because they would punish us for things that you didn’t know. We were also attending the normal school after which we were expected to attend temple classes and it was in a way compulsory.

Unlike most of the Christian principals who became devoted Christians and are still living out the principles of Christianity, it appears as if Paul was never really a devoted and committed Hindu. Rather, he used its rituals and celebrations for the external benefits it offered to an

impoverished family. He converted to Christianity during his high school years for the same reason – possible external benefits. More specifically, he saw Christianity as a way of escaping from being unrecognised while at the same time acquiring “healing powers”.

In a high school, I then became a Christian. At this stage religion became an influence of people’s lives in many ways. The change of religion because people get healed became popular in my community. That was the main reason for most of us to convert to Christianity. For instance, if someone in the family gets sick pastors came, prayed and people got healed.

Even so, he seems to have been more committed to Christianity than he was to Hinduism because, like some of the Christian principals he also began to spread Christian teachings to younger generation. By his own admission he learnt a lot about Christianity through going to church which was a matter of must. “I served as a Sunday school member and became the youth leader at a certain stage where I was engaged in Christian teachings to young children”. This commitment did not last, however. When he went to college he met with a Muslim girl, whom he married. He then converted to Islam. Paul’s multiple conversions seem to suggest that he has never really understood or committed to the religious principles underlying any of the religions he followed. Religion to him was always a means towards an end, something external to his own spirituality. He adopted different religions with the hope of gaining some or other external / pragmatic rather than internal / spiritual benefit from it. His lack of commitment to a specific dogma or faith would inevitably affect/influence the way in which he feels about and implements State-imposed religion policies.

5.2.3 Conclusion

Actually, only one principal belonged to Hinduism because at the time of the interviews, Paul was a Muslim. This therefore makes it impossible to draw any general conclusions. However, their experiences seem to suggest both a greater willingness to adopting other religions. Both feelings would, I would argue, have an impact on the way they view and deal with changes in religion in education policy.

5.3 Christian principals’ narratives

All the other participating principals, ten of them, were Christians. The majority were never exposed to other religions, not until the introduction of the new religion-in education policy. Some were, though, and this exposure does seem to have had an influence on the way they

experienced and/or mediated the implementation of the different religion policies implemented in education over the years.

Once again, I first tell their stories. Then I identify the similarities and differences between their experiences as indicated in these stories, using these as basis for my conclusions about the impact that their religious experiences had on their role as implementers and/or mediators of the implementation of the new religion in education policy.

5.3.1 Tom's story

Tom told me that he was *born and raised in a Christian environment* where church going was the norm and he emphatically mentioned that he was raised in terms of *Christian values* that *he still applies even to date*. He stated that he was schooled in exclusively Afrikaans speaking Christian institutions where religious education was offered as part of the school curriculum. As he recalled his experience, he mentioned that the school day would commence with an assembly that was dedicated to Christian devotions and that religious leaders from different Christian denominations would be invited to deliver sermons. Tom, like every Christian child, attended Sunday school.

When he entered secondary school Tom came into contact with learners from other religions. However, he continued with Religious Studies as the environment - an Afrikaans Christian-faith based school -- allowed this. He indicated that, at this stage, he was grown up age-wise hence had a greater understanding of Christian principles. "As a follower of Jesus, whom he regarded as a role model for teachers", he said, Tom became actively involved in church services, something that led to his graduation as a Sunday school teacher for junior children. His role as the Sunday school teacher went on even when he went to university. Tom valued his position as a Sunday school teacher since it gave him the opportunity of being a role model for the children he led. It also instilled in him *leadership skills and values* that, according to him, contributed significantly to his effectiveness as a school manager.

Tom articulated that he started his teaching career before 1994 in an Afrikaans speaking urban secondary school with a Christian ethos in the Gauteng province. According to him, because the schools he was attached to were mostly Christian-faith based, Christian religious education was the norm. Also, considering the reality that parents from other religions would be against the way the school was run after 1994, when religious changes came into effect, and after 2003, when the new religion policy was released, the principal used to make it clear

to these parents that the school subscribed to Christian principles. He would then ask them to indicate if they had a problem with their children attending Christian devotions. Parents seemed not to have a problem with that. In support of his principal's address to parents, Tom pointed out that he believes that the "...values we bring to the Christian devotions or values emphasised during these devotions are exactly the same as those that Muslims would have. If we teach about respect, they teach about it as well".

Tom told me that he was appointed to a principal post in an urban, multi-cultural / multi-religious secondary school in the Gauteng province soon after 2003 and that he found the expectation that he should implement a religion policy where more than one religion, not one denomination like before, were represented. What challenged him most, so he said, was the fact that Muslim children would ask to be excused to go to mosque every Friday at 12:00. At that time he had about 35 Muslim learners.

In spite of the religious diversity in the school Tom indicated that he maintained the *status quo* in that he continued to operate in accordance with the Christian doctrine. In considering and accommodating those that are not Christians, he said, he would inform non-Christian parents that the school subscribed to the Christian faith but that they should feel free to invite their religious leaders to come and address their children as part of their different religious observances. That, according to him has worked out well in terms of preventing tensions that could erupt due to conflicting religious interests. Evidence that this approach works, according to him, can be found in the fact that he has not really had any negative experiences. Muslim children also attend assemblies and Christian ceremonies; they don't have a problem with that. Very few of them have asked to be excused on Fridays for mosque.

Narrating how his school operates taking into consideration the new religion policy, Tom said that the school starts with Christian devotions every Monday where he, as the principal, leads the assembly. He mentioned that educators and Student Representative Council conduct assemblies on Wednesdays. Every appointee to his school is, however, informed that the school follows the Christian faith but Tom normally tells new appointees that should they feel uncomfortable about the way religious issues are dealt with in the school, they should feel free to confront him. "So far", he claimed, "all the educators participate in the morning devotions, even the few that do not subscribe to Christianity", and to him this is the indication that they are satisfied with the way religion matters are dealt with by the school.

In terms of values promotion, Tom told me that his school has a weekly values period on the time-table, where time is spent on dealing with a specific value. As the principal he is responsible for this task with his senior staff members, and in most cases he invites Christian guest speakers to address learners. On the issue of teaching religion education in the Life Orientation Programme, Tom indicated that his school does not teach about specific religions in depth; instead, only the basics of the different religions are taught. He added that although the Gauteng Department of Education has prescribed supporting material for religion education, the school has also organised a publisher who provides them with *additional support material* (i.e. CDs, DVDs and text books) for the subject area. Considering the religiously diverse composition of his school and the possibility that some of the religious leaders might be unavailable, Tom mentioned that on several occasions he has invited and allowed the *invitation of different religious leaders* to the school to give the insights of their religions to learners and staff.

Regarding the SGB selection, Tom stated that more often than not, he approached parents that he knows have expertise the school may need. According to him, even though he encourages those parents to make themselves available for selection and some few individuals to nominate the suggested parents, he does not have an influence on the final decision. To prove that he does not take sides in this process, he mentioned that *at one stage, the chairperson of the SGB was from the Hindu community and his wife was a Muslim. He would be invited to speak at the assembly or at a ceremony that would be opened in a Christian way and he had no problem with that.* Lastly, in terms human rights protection, Tom related an incident where he was faced with the moral dilemma of whether to support or oppose the pregnancy policy of the school. One of his Grade 11 learners was supposed to be removed from school because she fell pregnant. Although, in accordance with his Christian life philosophy, which he acquired at secondary school, he agreed that *sex before marriage* is not allowed, he also took cognisance of Jesus' teaching that it is not for us to judge.

My job as the principal was 'How I could help the learner have her right to education protected while taking care of the unborn baby at the same time. If I could not help the learner, I could have affected the unborn baby. The girl fell pregnant in 2010 and had her baby beginning March 2011, meaning that she did not attend school the whole of the first term. She came back after her 4 months maternity leave and the teachers gave her all the outstanding work and the necessary support. Because of that, she passed her Metric with 73 per cent average.

5.3.2 *Mark's story*

Mark told me that he grew up in a Christian-faith based community where he and his peers learnt about values that played a significant role in their transformation. They were taught how to *live with others*, how to change and adapt to the world, as well as *how to forgive* at a stage when people were really angry with the National Party. In his household, his brothers and he were taught to *focus on what is true and correct*, to *understand that change is real*, and that it was *taking place*. He also learnt that his family and the greater part of the church community would *not be aggressive and disrespectful* or go on a hunt as was expected at that stage. Mark described the immense impact his family and the church community played in his life not only by saying, “Halleluiah, Jesus Christ” but, by *imparting values* that made him realise God’s purpose in his life, *how people should work and live together* and how to pass through that transition phase.

Mark told me that he grew up with non-English speaking learners. The school he attended was exclusively for whites at that stage, that is, until 1994 when all learners were Afrikaans speaking Christians. He emphasised the fact that his *parents enrolled him in Christian schools* because they believed that such *schools had norms and values concomitant with the Christian belief*. He went on to say that general school life was on the *teachings of the Bible and the Christian religion*. Within a week, they would have either a *lesson or two on Bible studies*. The school would *start with Scripture reading and prayer* and would close in the same way. Although there were no African learners in his schools, they would have lessons where *other religions such as African traditions* were explored and explained in order to sensitise them to a newly-emerging South African context.

Mark emphasised the impact that Christianity had on him and his community at large. According to him, his up-bringing and schooling in a Christian based community gave him the confidence to talk about his Christian faith, a faith in Jesus Christ Who influences lives as well as about the deeper meaning of life itself. Such teachings, he claimed, created a bond between him and others, on the rugby field, with his play-mates and in the classroom. The same bond manifested in his household in activities like praying together, having dinner together, and going to church together.

The same pattern was evident in the Christian-faith based, primarily Afrikaans-speaking secondary school which he later attended, i.e. opening and closing the school day with scripture reading, prayer and assemblies with a short sermon on Mondays. They would also

have religious periods, Christian based but *informing them about other religions*. After secondary school Mark furthered his studies in the United States of America (USA), where he had his first exposure to people of different religions. He did not only hear about their teachings but was in the same institution with them. Let's hear what he says about it.

I was a Christian amongst Indians, Muslims and school that has got no specific religion. The school had 54 different cultures as entity. We found ourselves part of celebrations for instance, Easter for Christians; Divali for Hindus, meaning that every other week we had off day just to give recognition of all different religions. But, in the classroom, there were "sanctions" where London people were not mixed with the rest of us due to different languages as it was difficult for them to manage. That called for many meetings on different religions and the golden thread every time in all these meetings, was about the common values in these religions. These included the focus on team work, peace, space, acceptance, and forgiveness. Whenever, for example, Muslims or Christians had their festivals to celebrate, the whole school would celebrate together.

In 1994, when religious freedom became a reality in South Africa, Mark stayed in a hostel where, in terms of religious matters, the Christian *status quo* was maintained. Dinner, lunch and breakfast were dealt with the Christian way, i.e. starting with prayers being said to thank God for the food to be received. According to his understanding, the practice was not enforced: it was simply the way it was.

Later Mark was attached to a Hindu-Muslim-based community school serving mostly Pakistani-Indian learners. Even though they practised their own religions, he noticed that their families, too, practiced their faith and that they had a deep sense of values related to family relations such as respect for elders, something that reminded him of the values he was taught when he grew up in his Christian-faith based schools. He indicated that he was attracted to the way they shared their religion and to their way of doing things. Whenever they had their festive days, they would share that with him and he was glad to experience that from a worldly view, to see the *common values shared by Muslim, Hinduism and Christian communities*. In 2001 Mark was appointed as a teacher and two years later, in 2003 in a management position, in an urban, Christian-faith based, Afrikaans-speaking secondary school in the Gauteng province.

In expressing his views on the new religion policy, Mark indicated that he thought the national religion policy was too rigid and directive. According to him, schools should have the liberty to choose which religion/s they want to follow. The school community knows

what it wants for its children thus enforcing religions that were not their preference on their children was not a proper way of doing things and provoked conflict. “We are not happy with the enforcement that is going on in our school,” he said.

Mark admitted that the Christian religious education orientation is hard to change. According to him, there are learners and staff from religions other than Christianity in his school but, since most of the learners at his schools are Christians the principle of *majority rule* is used when drafting religion policy. This is what gives his school the right to operate in a Christian way. They open and close the school and *meetings with prayer, Scripture reading and the singing of hymns*. The *SMT is responsible for assemblies* on Mondays while the rest of the staff members and learners participate. At the beginning of every year parents of new learners are orientated and informed that the school follows the Christian faith and that there is assembly on Mondays. Parents are usually informed that learners who follow religions or beliefs other than Christianity are *given space to observe their religions*.

Mark also indicated that before appointing a new staff member, he makes the candidate aware of the religion the school follows and it is up to the person concerned to accept the post under these conditions or not. He emphasised that their role as a school, teaching staff and an SGB is to come up with an ideology that will not disappoint them and their learners at the end of the day. He stated that they strive to uphold the values they subscribe to for survival “*out there*”; with the core of their mission being to ensure that learners will manage their lives as young adults in accordance with these principles. The role of the SGB in religion policy implementation, according to Mark, is not to override religious practices of the community but to see to it that the views of the community regarding religious preferences are respected and practised. For that matter, since the majority of the school community subscribe to the Christian faith, Christianity still remains the preferred religion in the school.

In terms of religion education being part of the LO programme, Mark indicated that the school offers two sessions a week. It is in these sessions where religious leaders from different denominations (not religions) would be invited to come and *share values* with learners and teachers. He mentioned, however, that there is a longer session offered to those of the Christian faith where prayers are said, hymns are sung and Scriptures are read. Also, he further pointed out, because the majority of the school community members are Christians and the *religion policy of the school supports practice of the Christian faith*, the school has assigned the first week of the third term for a special activity called *live for Christ* and a

variety of Christian activities such as sharing, supporting and involvement of learners in their community and family lives are observed for the whole week. In his view, Mark stated, this practice as the backbone of Christianity and therefore he believes that it should be a feature of schools.

5.3.3 John's story

John grew up in Pretoria East in the Gauteng province where he used to hear some of his peers claiming that they go to church on Sundays while others would say that they do not go to church because their parents did not believe in Christianity. Instead, they would show him skin cuts on their bodies as an indication that they believed in African traditional healing practices which according to them, rejected Christianity. John could recall the time when he was in Grade 1 in a Christian-faith based farm school where everything which accepted church going on Sundays was the norm. He remembered that his first exposure to the Bible was during school assemblies. The principal would just read them *Psalm 23, the Lord is my Shepherd*, and sometimes *Proverbs 6* to motivate them but that was all. There was no preaching at assembly. He also remembered that they had to memorise and recite Psalm 23, which he found difficult because he was still too young to understand what it actually meant.

John moved to township schools when he was to do Standard 6 (Std 6), the current Grade 8. While there had been only one church and one street on the farm, he was then surrounded by buildings with different shapes and sizes. On asking what they were that he first heard about Muslims, their mosques and the caps they wore on their heads for identification and other purposes. The school, however, was also primarily Christian in character and he remembered having to recite certain extracts from the Bible for marks in the Afrikaans first language classroom. Here, too, the Monday assemblies included the principal reading and explaining a verse from the Bible to learners as a way of motivating them. He also remembered that once a month some or other ministers would be invited to come and preach to them.

John's high school years were spent in the Mpumalanga High School, the current Gauteng, and the former Transvaal where he came into contact with learners from other religions in much larger numbers than was the case at primary school. He mentioned that although the other religions existed, the religion he heard most about throughout the township was Christianity. Second to Christianity was African Traditional Religion, which included the use of *sangomas* as healers but he also observed Muslim learners leaving school early on Fridays

to attend mosque on Fridays. He recalled that Muslim learners were given corporal punishment for not attending assembly as well as for going to the mosque, thus technically forcing them to attend the assembly, and pray like Christians learners with their eyes closed. The message John got from this was that religions other than Christianity were not allowed on school premises and that learners who challenged school authority were asking for punishment.

During his teacher training, John attended institutions with a Christian ethos and values but, although the majority of students were Christians, it was here that he first became aware of religions like Hinduism, Judaism and many more, mostly through reading up on them to satisfy his curiosity.

Regarding the impact that Christian education played in his life, John indicated that it served as his life compass. He believed that having been brought up in a Christian family and attending schools with a Christian ethos markedly influenced his thinking, the direction his life took, and the way he managed his schools. Nevertheless, according to him, having read up on other religions has made him a little more careful about the way he manages religious matters at his school. Also, being a Coloured, with a coloured person's perspective on Christianity, John told me that he also observe African Traditional rituals and as a fact that his forefathers and ancestors still had a bearing in his life, which sounded strange to me because Coloureds don't usually observe African beliefs. To illustrate this, he told me that, at the time of the interviews, he had just bought a new car and that his mother, who was the first person to ride in it, *prayed on the car*. Moreover, since his father had already passed on, he and his mother visited his father's *grave and showed him the car* because, according to *ancestral beliefs* his father needed to know that his son had bought a new car and had to bless him and the car.

John's first teaching post – before 1994 - was at a small primary farm school which also operated in the Christian way. This, according to him, set the tone for his *entire career*, which *has been informed by Christianity*. John was appointed as a school principal in a primary township school in the Gauteng province soon after 1994, a school that was surrounded by *exclusively African Traditional communities*. To illustrate the influence of these traditions he cited two incidents. In the one, a family blamed the school for the death of their daughter, claiming that the child had been bewitched. In narrating this case, John indicated that, while it was normal practice for learners to take off their jerseys during hot summer days, this child

had accidentally left her jersey on the school fence. Some of the other learners found it there and took it to the staff room where the girl collected it the next day. A few weeks later, she fell ill and was admitted in hospital where she passed on. In the other case, one of his staff members lost a leg as a result of his refusal to consult medical doctors. As the principal, John would give him some days off duty advising him to go see the doctor. Instead; the educator would consult traditional healers.

Notwithstanding the strength of these beliefs, John indicated that morning assemblies are used to spread the Christian gospel. While he, as the school principal leads assemblies on Mondays, educators and *Christian pastors* rotate in taking charge of morning assemblies on Wednesdays and Fridays. During these assemblies *prayers are said, hymns are sung and Scriptures are read*. Staff and parents' meetings also start with prayer and the singing of hymns regardless of the religious diversity in the school.

Regarding the drafting of the religion policy of the school, John indicated that, as the SGB, they meet to discuss and decide on all policy matters. It is here that he applies his theoretical knowledge of leadership and management to guide such discussions. As a result of these discussions the school policy allows for the practice of religions other than Christianity within the school premises but as the principal of the school he only allows this if followers of religions other than Christianity provide proof of their dedication to such religions. Failing this, the school *will continue to observe Christianity only, no matter what*, John said.

As regards the teaching of religion education in the LO programme, John indicated that, due to a lack of material resources and the limited knowledge of educators about religions other than Christianity, educators teach only the basics. "For instance, they may just mention religions in South Africa or in the world, talk about Jesus for Christians and Mohammed for Muslims. Not very much in-depth, but the majority of the stuff taught is about Christianity,"

John's overall experience of the new religion policy is negative because it makes it difficult to run the school. Prior to its release they, as educators, did not have a problem with leading the assembly and learners were attentive at morning assemblies. Since its release, educators have excuses for not leading assemblies and learners find reasons for late coming.

5.3.4 *Connie's story*

Connie told me that she was born and raised in a Christian community in the Eastern parts of Kwa-Zulu Natal. She was schooled in Christian public schools serving *exclusively Christian communities*, with *Christian devotions* being observed for about 30 minutes every morning, during assemblies, followed by Guidance. *Pastors and ministers would be invited to come and give religious instruction to both learners and staff.*

She received her secondary education at the school where she is now employed as the principal. She told me that the served school primarily Christian learners though they were from various denominations. As was the case in the primary school, morning assemblies were mostly conducted by the school principal, with *religious leaders* from different denominations sometimes being given the opportunity to share scriptures. Her teacher training was done via distance education hence she did not know how the institution dealt with religion matters. Soon after completion of her higher education studies she was appointed at her former secondary school as a secretary, and because of the shortage of staff, she also offered Guidance sessions to learners.

Regarding the impact of religious education in her personal and professional life, Connie indicated that it added great value to her life because without it she did not think she would be as happy as she was at the time of the interviews. It was Christian religious education which, according to her, influenced her outlook on life in general because it introduced her to “God”, learnt that without belief in and obedience to God her life would be completely miserable. She believed that religious education changed her life while she was still a child because when she was introduced to God’s word (the Bible) her behaviour underwent a remarkable change because she followed God’s instructions. He protected and guided her on how to follow a way of life that pleases Him. This, according to her, is not what she observes in people who have not gone through religious education.

To all educators, Connie’s said,

I believe that if more of us as educators would follow Bible principles or Christianity, we would experience some differences in our lives because we are the role models of the learners we educate. As educators, we must live by example because learners come to school to learn life principles from us. Believing that what we always do is right, they imitate. There must be life in whatever we say and do in order to make a difference in other people’s lives.

It was while Connie was the secretary and guidance educator at her former secondary school that religion in education policies started changing. Her sense of these changes was that, although religious education was cut out of the school curriculum, this could not stop schools from observing Christian devotions. At the school where she was working, morning assemblies were held once a week, on Mondays only. The principal, SMT and the invited religious leaders were responsible for running assemblies and led learners in saying “The Lord’s Prayer”. Thereafter, an educator would be requested to have the choir sing a Christian song.

Connie told me that she was appointed to the management position after 2003. According to her, nothing changed in terms of religious observances at the assembly apart from the fact that staff members and learners who were non-religious were not forced to attend assemblies: they were free to excuse themselves. In her own words, “We are amaJehovah’s Witnesses, so we normally request that our children should be excluded from religious observances. Sometimes the leader from our denomination would come and assemble with our children at that time”.

In terms of the drafting of the religion policy at her school, Connie made it clear that the parent body has never been included in such discussions because, in the more than 20 years she has been attached to this school she has never seen the SGB calling parents meetings for a religion policy discussion - nothing in relation to religion is ever mentioned to parents. She pointed out that even in the school’s application / admission form no information is required on the religious status of the child. Connie explained that as the SMT, they are responsible for religion policy drawing. The rest of the stakeholder groupings have to embrace the way religious matters are dealt with at school. Those that are not comfortable approach the school and their concerns are taken care of.

Regarding religion education as a subject in the LO programme, Connie acknowledged its existence and the fact that educators offer it. However, she was not sure of the content of the subject area: she has never heard it being discussed and even her own children have never mentioned it to her. For that reason, she confessed that she was *not sure whether any teaching and learning about religions is taking place in her school*.

Concerning changes that are brought by religion policy, Connie indicated that thus far she has only noted the removal of religious education from the curriculum and the fact that non-religious and people from other religions are free not to attend assemblies or other religious

activities at school. Even so, her sense is that the removal of religious education from the school curriculum has actually affected learner and educators' discipline negatively in that they, as school managers, struggle to discipline both learners and educators who seem not to be religious anymore. In the past, according to Connie, religious education was used to discipline learners and educators but nowadays children think that religious matters are for adults only thus their behaviour is worse than the behaviour of school children in the past. She was also disappointed that educators no longer regard it as their duty to run assemblies and guide learners; instead, they hide behind "freedom" and "voluntarism". As a result, only the principal and the SMT members conduct the assembly, a practice *which is not good*.

5.3.5 Sello's story

In narrating his religious experiences Sello told me that he was educated at Christian schools where religious education was a compulsory subject for all learners in the school and where Christian devotions, during assembly, were part of the daily routine. Assemblies typically consisted of a prayer - said by the principal, an educator or a church minister - singing of hymns, Scripture reading, and the recitation, by learners, of some Bible verses.

According to Sello, nothing much changed in terms of religion matters as he progressed to a secondary school except that he also took Biblical Studies as one of the electives in the curriculum and that it became one of his best subjects, simply because it dealt with the content of the Bible. He, too, did his secondary education in the school where he was later appointed as the school principal, a position he held during the time of the interviews.

Upon furthering his studies, Sello went to a teacher training college where morning devotions were not part of the daily college programme although there were days when they would sing hymns and read from the Bible. There were also occasions when ministers would visit the college during Biblical studies lessons but this was not a regular occurrence. Although it was long ago, Sello could recall moments when a particular theme would be emphasised through quotes from the Bible. According to him, those were his most joyous moments those days because he and his fellow students found Christian religious education very interesting: they studied famous parts of the Bible, something which he does not see today's generation being able to do. They were even able to recite certain parts of the Bible, like Psalms and so on and he could still quote certain verses that he learned during those days. "Oh yes", he said, "it had a very...positive spiritual influence on a person's life." He even said that he felt sorry for

today's learners because they are missing a lot due to the absence of religious education in schools at present regardless of the punitive measures taken if they did not “know certain parts of the Bible. You would not spare the rod, because during that time, corporal punishment was still used. We were therefore prepared to learn all the verses because of fear of corporal punishment”. His commitment to Christianity notwithstanding, Sello felt that “the ancestors have eh... influence on our lives, and therefore they have to be honoured and respected through the performance of a number of rituals on their honour.”

Sello joined the teaching profession prior to 1994. He told me that at his school in those years, nothing changed from what he grew up with in terms of religious education. He disclosed that his principal did not implement religious changes, based on the argument that the character of the school was Christian, as were most of the parents and learners. Therefore, Christianity was given preference. They had morning assemblies where religious rituals were performed as they were prior to 1994; pastors were invited to come and preach and stakeholder groupings seemed to enjoy this as much as he and his peers had enjoyed it in days past.

Sello became a school principal before 2003, i.e. before the new religion-in-education policy came into effect. When this happened, according to Sello, everything in terms of religion changed. In the first instance he realised that the development of a religion policy for the school was one of the functions of the SGB but he also knew that not all the parents understood this since they were used to the old school committees. These committees were not democratically elected: the principal would just identify one old man or woman and make them part of school committee and they would serve for too many years. He, himself, does not involve the parents or the SGB in the drafting of religion policy - the whole process is steered by him, the school principal, but he does involve the SMT in the process.

Sello added that his educators do not read policies either and for that reason, they give no inputs in policy discussions. Faced with this calibre of educators, he has no option but to influence decisions in most cases. He did, however, involve the SMT in bringing the whole idea of religion policy to the SGB, informing the latter that, in accordance with stipulations in the South African Schools Act (No. 84 of 1996), there must be equal treatment of all religions. The SGB, so he claimed, did not respond hence the school retained the *status quo* as far as religion was concerned. This decision was also informed by his belief that Christianity still deserves the prime position. Besides, Sello claimed, in his school learners

have never asked to be excused from assembly. This, according to him, indicates that children are still very respectful of authority.

Sello also pointed out that although assembly periods are being minimised by the National Curriculum Statement, the school has an assembly on Mondays where they perform all the rituals that they used to in the past. They also open meetings with scripture reading and prayer, with the chairperson of the SGB simply looking at members or pointing to those who are Christians and request them to open with a prayer. He reported that stakeholder groupings respond positively to all of this, so much so that some of the learners have approached him as the principal, asking him to be given the opportunity to conduct assembly because they admire the way educators or visitors preach and they also want a slot. He indicated that the applause after a learner has delivered an item on religion is a sign of appreciation.

With regard to the requirement that religious observances be equitable, Sello indicated that he is sometimes approached by members of the community from other religious persuasions. He recalled an instance where a member of the Muslim committee was given a slot to lead the assembly the Islam way because he argued that there were Muslim learners in school. However, according to Sello, learners and staff alike indicated that they did not find it as enjoyable as Christian ministers do, as the principal; he stopped affording such opportunities to those from other religions.

Regarding the teaching and learning of different religions in Life Orientation, Sello mentioned that as the school principal he was not aware of the content of the very subject area. He also mentioned that the teaching of religion education is problematic due to a shortage of classrooms as well as to the fact that some of the Life Orientation educators claim not to be Christians but African Traditionalists. This has led to the school not offering Religion Education as a subject area.

Pertaining to the impact of religion in schools, Sello recalled that when the new Constitution was adopted, it had a very negative impact on religious education or Biblical studies as such. Because of the clause guaranteeing freedom of religion to particular religion, such religion may be favoured at the expense of others. Also, since the new curriculum (NCS) includes time specifications, they find themselves with insufficient time to assemble every day. Consequently, learners know very little about the Bible, except those who go to Sunday school, who know a little bit of it. He bases his claim on the fact that, during his school days even community members who did not go to school for long or those that had nothing to do

with the church would quote certain parts of the Bible that they were taught during their school days to advise whoever was around them. Because they are now not required to learn such verses at school, Sello claims, today's learners to be spiritually empty, having nothing to fall back on in future. According to him, even if a person is not fully committed to Christianity, his / her ability to quote some verses from the Bible will make him / her think twice before doing something bad but off course, since "today's learners have nothing to quote", this won't happen in their case.

5.3.6 *Sipho's story*

In narrating his experience, Sipho, who was also schooled in Christian-faith based institutions, indicated that, apart from having religious education as a subject, they also had assemblies, where they would sing hymns, read Scriptures, and the principal or a minister of religion would explain or interpret such scripture readings. Sipho stressed that religious education was not optional: it was meant for certification because when they completed Standard 5 (Std 5), the current Grade 7, they would be baptised and given a certificate which would enable them to further their studies. Without a baptismal certificate, according to Sipho, one did not qualify for further education because at the time Christianity was the norm.

Sipho remembered that when he was at the teacher training college he took Biblical studies as an elective. The course dealt with the compilation of the Bible - how different books were selected - and things like Biblical exegesis. He continued with Biblical Studies later, when he enrolled at a university.

Sipho's memories of his experiences about religious education were joyous ones. He recalled that, as youngsters, they shouted out responses so that everyone would hear that they were knowledgeable about the prayer. Also, they normally wanted to be first to read out the words. According to him, he did not realise at the time, what effect religious education had on his life but now, reflecting on it during the course of the interviews, he could see that it had shaped him into the person that he is - a religious person.

Sipho started his teaching career prior to 1994 - in a rural primary school in Limpopo, which subscribed to the Christian ethos and still did at the time of the interviews. Although religious education was no longer compulsory after 1994 nothing changed at his school in this regard – it was business as usual, i.e. morning assembly continued and baptism was still there,

although no longer pre-requisite for furthering studies. The only things that changed were that religious instruction as a subject gradually disappeared and that the relationship between the school and the church changed: whereas the community used classrooms for church services on Sundays in the past this was no longer the case.

Concerning the involvement of parents in school governance – i.e. in the SGB - Sipho indicated that although he was not part of the SMT at that time, he had not seen any meetings where school management (as they were called at the time) decided on the changes. The school principal, according to Sipho, just adopted whatever policies came from the circuit. For example, in 2003, when the National Policy on Religion and Education was released, Sipho was still a teacher but he was aware of the policy since they were told that morning devotions were no longer compulsory, that participation was now voluntary, a matter of individual choice. Even so, according to Sipho, all the staff members continued to attend assembly and educators continued conducting assemblies as per the timetable drawn for that particular purpose. He mentioned that educators were free to express their discomfort about the practice but this never happened.

Sipho was appointed to a managerial position after 2003, at another school, not the one where he had started off as an educator. Although the environment was different from that of his previous school, religion, according to Sipho, was dealt with in exactly the same way, perhaps because, like his previous school, this one as also formerly a missionary school. Sipho told me that in occasions where it is his turn to lead he always asks those attending whether they are comfortable to start with a prayer. He mentioned that they are typically astonished by the question because they were so used to praying before starting any task. So, they would not have any concern with that. Sipho disclosed that the practice of opening with prayer is also common amongst Distance Education learners in the University of Pretoria since they always start their sessions with prayer and the singing of a hymn without seeking approval from anyone. In other words, according to Sipho, religion policy changed on paper only. The teaching and learning of religion education as a subject area in LO is, however, dealt with according to prescribed material in the national curriculum.

With regard to the impact of current religion policy on the lives of learners, Sipho expressed the view that the absence of religious instruction in schools had a negative effect on learner behaviour: when Christian values were being taught in schools, learners behaved in a good way unlike today. Since then, as educators, they regard moral values as “the foundation of

any child's growth" children's lack of moral values makes it *tough* for principals and educators to do their job. Another factor that he regards as a major threat to his management of religion policy in his school is the presence of African Traditional orientations amongst the parent body which, he claims, largely determine the moral values of learners. He believes, therefore, that if parents could be converted to Christianity, there would be a change in their children's moral values since children typically model their lives on those of their parents.

5.3.7 Tefo's story

Tefo, too, attended Christian-faith based schools where religious education was the norm. He remembered a time when he was at primary school when they were told that the African Traditional religion was not the way to live. They would be mocked and asked how they could spend their time pleasing and praying to the ancestors. They were asked whether they really thought ancestors had any powers over their lives and that since they did not even know their ancestors it was stupid to think that they could have any influence on what was going on in their lives. Because of such teachings, Tefo believed, they could not stand up and talk about their African Traditional beliefs. Instead, they had to perform Christian rituals before they started the normal procedure of attending classes. Morning assemblies in those years were a matter of must: every morning they had to assemble and one member of staff would read a text from the Bible, explain it and they would conclude with a prayer.

Even when they went to their different classes, they would start the lesson by reciting a verse from the Bible. In addition, they had a period specifically dedicated to religious education each day and they would have examination on it at the end of the year, with the marks they achieved being reflected on their reports.

In relating the impact that religious education had on his personal and professional life, Tefo emphasised that religious education was morally good because it showed him the way to love and respect other people, which he believed to be the correct way of doing things, the correct way of living. He emphasised that what he learnt from his family and Christian-faith based schools he attended is still part of him. He even remembered some verses from the Bible and the Ten Commandments (i.e. do not steal, avoid adultery) that he still adheres to in his daily life. He stresses that he sees it as his mission to pass those teachings on to his own children at home and he vowed that he would take such teachings to the grave with him.

Tefo joined the teaching profession prior to 1994, starting as an educator in a rural secondary school in the Limpopo province. He told me that in that school religious orientations were run the way he was used to when he was a child. They would pray, sing hymns and either the principal or an educator would read from scripture and explain it to the learners. He was in the same school in 1994 when changes regarding religious issues came into effect but in a HoD position. The principal announced the change to stakeholders and requested their inputs. According to him, parents and learners were against the issue of dropping the Christian religious orientation of the school. Parents declared, amongst others, that, since they grew up and were schooled in the Christian religion, they wanted their children to go through the same experience. Hence, morning assemblies continued as always.

Some of the educators would, however, abscond from running the assembly, claiming that they were not Christians. In responding to such behaviour, the principal provided for those who believed in or were knowledgeable about Islamic, Hinduism, Buddhist, African Traditional religions to indicate their position so that parents could be informed and decide whether they could be accommodated in the school programme or not. However, not a single educator was prepared to share his / her religious beliefs at assembly. Educators who loved learners, according to Tefo, and who felt the need to pass their own religious morals on to learners regardless of the influence of those who were against the way religious matters were dealt with, continued engaging learners in the performance of Christian devotions at the assembly and parents supported that.

Later on Tefo accepted a position as principal in a rural primary school, still in the Limpopo province, which was populated mostly by learners parented by single mothers seriously committed to Christianity. He told me that in 2003, when the new religion policy was released, he approached parents about its implementation. According to him, parents were against the policy, indicating that they grew up doing things the Christian way. So, they wanted their children to just continue the same way. Since they did not have any learners from other religions at this school, they continued with morning assembly from Monday to Friday where prayers are still said and hymns are still sung. He explained that as part of their reading programme, learners are afforded the opportunity to read texts from the Bible and the teacher would offer some explanations. Tefo mentioned that parents at this school are aware that, should they not feel satisfied with the way he dealt with religion education in school, they should not hesitate to tell him but, according to him, not even a single parent came

which to him indicated satisfaction. So, he told me, they continue with everything the Christian way.

The impact of the new religion policy on educators, according to Tefo, was negative because before 1994, every educator used to be willing to lead assemblies but now they keep on referring to their right to religious freedom when asked to do so. This, he claims, sets a bad example to learners, depriving them of a solid moral base. Tefo believes that the policy should have been selective, claiming that the policy would be suitable for multi-cultural schools but not for learners who share the same home language, who grew up in one and the same community where they share the same beliefs and practices. He questioned the applicability of religion policy in his community where they had so many of these traditional healers who at the same time wanted their children to be raised the Christian way. In emphasising how powerful Christianity was in his community, Tefo pointed out that although he has not been in each house, he was certain that each and every household has a Bible because he sees “troops” of community members moving in different directions on Sundays heading to different churches.

5.3.8 Neo's story

Neo, too, remembered his school days as being Christian-oriented: assemblies were run in the Christian way in that the songs that they were singing were Christian and that no pastors, ministers or religious leaders from religions other than Christianity were ever invited to address the school at assemblies.

Neo told me that he became part of students who were doing Biblical Studies at high school because most of them believed in Christianity, mentioning that he also joined Student Christian Movements where learners would gather together and pray. When he got to the college, he chose Biblical Studies as his area of specialisation. He stressed that although no one told them that the college did not want other religions, he could see by Christian religious devotions that were performed that only Christianity reigned and, although there were rumours that the college allowed the practice of other religions, he did not witness any such practices taking place. Educators used to emphasise Christianity as the true religion and should a learner come to class wearing anything associated with other religions, his/her parents would be called and the learner would have to stop the practice immediately. Morning assemblies were compulsory for everyone. Even though those who did not believe

in Christianity did not have to sing at assembly, they had to attend. Neo pointed out he continued his membership in Student Christian Movement while at the college since Christianity was the only religion practiced by then.

Regarding the influence Christian religion education had on his personal and professional life Neo said that he viewed its influence to be positive, teaching him sound values like, “Do not steal”, and “Do not insult”, and so on, which has made him sensitive to the way his colleagues behave. For instance, when he hears some insults amongst them, he would call them and request them to respect one another. In that way, he indicated, he promotes the value of respect in his school because respect implies *not insulting* or talking in a harsh way to one another, but treating one another in a human way. This, according to Neo, is the Christian way.

Neo started teaching, with seven other educators, soon after 1994 in a rural primary school in the Mpumalanga province. Because almost all of them were Christians, he told me that they emphasised the importance of attending assembly and if learners came to assembly wearing hats like those worn by Muslims, they would call such learners and tell them to stop this practice. He pointed out that by so doing; they aimed to discourage those learners from influencing others since their home background and the churches they attended had an influence on the way they approached religious matters. Although he and his staff attended workshops and courses offered by the provincial department where officials stressed that “everyone has the right to freedom of religion”, when they came to school, they would want all learners to practise Christianity. They would want them to sing Christian songs. In terms of inviting pastors and ministers, he told me that they never invited any from other religions - they never invited Muslims, Hindus or any religious leader other than Christian leaders.

After 2003, Neo was appointed in a managerial position in a rural primary school in the Mpumalanga province. According to him, as the school management team (SMT), never discussed the issue of religion with parents. In not one of their meetings did they ever think of involving parents in religious discussions: they took it for granted that since they were Christians they had to promote Christianity. As the SMT they did not want to discuss religious matters openly because they were afraid that parents might come up and demand that the school should promote a particular religion. So, they played the *duck and dive game*: instead of discussing such issues with them, they developed a policy. In the policy they specified that there is freedom of religion within the school whereas in practise, they would

strategically encourage learners to participate in Christian devotions, not telling them that the school follows only Christianity.

Two years before the interviews for my study, Neo was appointed to a principal's position in a bigger rural primary school, still in the Mpumalanga province. According to him, he found that there was morning assembly where Christian songs were sung, and a prayer was said before the daily duties would begin. He mentioned that, since he was used to the same situation in his previous school, he was then satisfied with the way the school operated. He added that they opened their SGB and parents' meetings with a prayer and a Christian hymn and, because he was also a Christian, he would quote some Bible verses to strengthen his point of view. When doing so, he indicated, he would see parents nodding their heads as a sign of appreciation and interest. Even in the morning, in their briefing meetings on Fridays, they would pray. Up to the time of the interviews, Neo has not encountered any challenges from parents' side.

Regarding the drafting of the religion policy of the school, Neo indicated that, as the SMT, they formulated a proposal and took it to the SGB for approval. The SGB reviewed the proposal and, since they were happy with it, signed it. He made it clear that they did not discuss religion policy with the SGB. What they did was to cite a clause from the Constitution that states "Everyone has the right to freedom of religion..." with closer attention that it did not say *in our school*. The policy did not indicate that all religions were allowed, because they realised that it would affect everyone, including educators and learners. More specifically, they did not want to be specific about the religion or religions the school subscribes to because they were afraid that some people might challenge them with that clause. They also tried to be careful not to open doors to all religions or else that would invite trouble from the side of parents. So, according to him, they tried to be as neutral as they could not to provoke challenges. In terms of religious representation on the SGB, Neo indicated that, as the school management team, they accept members from any religion. However, they made sure that nothing related to religion is discussed with the parents of these learners.

Neo mentioned that, although they tried to play their games wisely, there were parents who were never part of discussions in meetings - they would just keep quiet and say no word, perhaps indicating their dissatisfaction. Another indication that some parents were not satisfied with the way the school deals with religion matters, according to Neo, was the fact

that some learners would come to school wearing Muslim hats. He stated that they would call such learners and tell them that such hats were not allowed at school. To illustrate his point, Neo related an incident where a learner came to school on one of the Fridays wearing that suspicious hat. The same learner approached the principal's office and requested permission to go to mosque at 12:00. As the principal, he called his SMT members and tried to find out in detail when the learner joined Islam, then called parents of the learner to discuss the matter with them. According to Neo, they had to convince the learner not to practice the religion during school hours because that was the time they had to write tests in most cases. They therefore, according to him, encouraged Muslim learners to go to mosque after school. He emphasised that because they were children and they did not have the support of parents, the Muslim children could not challenge the authority, they therefore had to obey and take principal's advice.

Neo further narrated that other learners would report that they did not want to participate at the assembly because they are asked to sing Christian songs and that is against their religion. He noted that such learners were advised to go to the assembly only to listen to announcements and keep quiet when others sing. Neo indicated that, as the principal, he warned educators not to force such learners to sing, so, they would attend and keep quiet. He explained that he tried as much as he could to balance the whole situation, allowing them to observe Islam devotions only after school at the same time requesting them to be part of the assembly.

Pertaining to the teaching of religion education in the LO programme, Neo explained that when he visited educators in classrooms, he realised that in most cases they are knowledgeable only about Christian matters, not about other religions. He mentioned that they would just name different religions to learners but going into detail about them posed a challenge. Therefore educators would dwell much on Christianity, not to promote it but because of their lack of knowledge regarding other religions perhaps because they have not been trained in these.

In short, Neo experienced the new religion policy as not having brought about any positive changes: in fact, educators hide behind it when they want to be excused from the duty list of leading morning assemblies.

5.3.9 *Mpho's story*

Mpho's Christian religious education was also firmly missionary-based and, because of this, delivered from a primarily European perspective. In both primary and secondary school, Christianity was the heart of everything they did hence they started the day with a Christian assembly and studied the Bible as a subject – religious education at primary school and Biblical Studies at secondary school. Perhaps because of this he continued with Biblical studies as an elective when he went to college. Even here they had morning assemblies, meetings were run in a Christian way and they had a strong Christian Students' Movement but there were also students at the college who subscribed to religions other than Christianity.

Mpho believed that his strictness as a principal is the result of Christian education and the Christian principles instilled in him during his school and college days. To illustrate how he applied these principles in his position as school principal he cited a case in which he reported an educator who had an affair with a learner to the provincial Head of Department because his Christian principles could not allow him, in his capacity as *in loco parentis* to allow such incidents to happen. Also, although he has caught a number of today's educators sharing a cigarette with learners his Christian principles, according to Mpho, do not allow that. Rather, they assist him in nurturing learners to become responsible adults.

Mpho started teaching in a black rural primary school in the Mpumalanga province soon after 1994. He remembered the assemblies at this school as being run in a Christian way since most educators there were Christians. Learners had to attend assemblies regardless of whether or not they subscribed to Christianity – there were many still following African Traditional ways - and were required to say prayers, sing hymns and listen to the reading of Scripture. Assemblies were basically run by the principal while educators were assigned to duties like controlling learners. In cases where educators indicated an interest in leading assemblies, such opportunities were granted.

In 2003 Mpho was appointed to a principal's position at a small primary farm school where all four educators were Christians. There was therefore no need for him to change anything in terms of religious observances and parents never complained. In fact, the relationship between the school and the community was such that community members used school facilities for church services on Sundays. When the school was closed down Mpho was relocated to the other primary school as an additional principal. The principal of that school was *sangoma* – i.e. a traditional healer - who did not subscribe to the Christian faith yet he

did not have any problem with the running of Christian assemblies as long as he did not have to attend them. Consequently they were run by Mpho and other educators, with all learners expected to attend them regardless of the fact that they were African traditionalists.

Mpho's third principalship was in a rural secondary school populated mostly by traditionalists of the Ndebele tribe who would interrupt children's schooling to send them to initiation schools and would tell him that neither they nor their children attended church. Since this did not affect the running of the school in terms of religion, assemblies continued as did the existence of Student Christian Movements. Religion education was not, however, offered as a subject.

At the time of my inquiry, Mpho was the principal of a secondary township school in the Gauteng province. He told me that the school was populated with learners with a wide range of religious orientations, which he had to accommodate. To illustrate how he did this he told me that there was a Muslim learner in the school who used to wear a *headscarf* and would not attend the assembly. Instead, Mpho gave him permission to use one of the classrooms to observe his religion. On the whole, though, parents were not particularly interested in what was happening in schools hence there have not been any serious conflicts relating to religion to date. The only complaints he got were from parents who believed that there were *Satanists* at school because their children fainted at school due to hot weather.

In terms of the teaching of religion education at his school, Mpho indicated that they looked into Christian principles and invited Christian pastors to the morning assemblies as well as to religion education lessons. He mentioned that the Christian character of his school was most apparent during religion education lessons where they use only Christian leaders and during times when only Christian pastors counselled learners who had drug or other problems which they wanted to discuss with someone.

Unlike the other Christian principals Mpho acknowledged that educators who taught religion education were probably biased against other religions because they were Christians and believed that Christian principles were the best principles to be taught to children and that Christianity was the best religion to subscribe to. His own observation in teaching religion education, according to Mpho, was that he noticed that there was something good in every religion. Nonetheless, as Christians, since they were not orientated on how to teach children about these other religions they did not have sufficient knowledge to do so.

As far as parent involvement was concerned Mpho indicated that seldom since he became an educator have parents concerned themselves with discussions concerning religion, asked which religion the school subscribed to during admission procedures or indicated a concern about religion during the selection or appointment of a new staff member. He told me that they just admitted the child, unless a parent told him that his child must be excused from assembly. He would then discuss the matter with the SMT and agree on ways in which they could handle the case.

Regarding the crafting of religion policy, Mpho made it clear that they considered the majority principle when drafting the policy. He explained that, as the SGB, they appointed a task team to draw up an initial draft of the policy but, because the majority of parents were Christians the school ultimately decided through the policy that Christianity was the religion to be followed and that the rest had no choice but to accept this.

Concerning the impact of the new religion policy, Mpho is of the opinion that when South Africa obtained its freedom in 1994, South Africans threw everything that was good out of the window. According to him, they lost touch with those Christian principles that they used to learn in schools and that the reason why learners behave the way they did at the time of the interviews was that the foundations of Christianity were no longer laid in schools - learners were no longer taught Christian principles. He further pointed out that before 1994, in accordance with Christian principles, schools were allowed to discipline learners but that this was no longer the case.

5.3.10 Nikiwe's story

In narrating her childhood experiences or religion Nikiwe remembered that religious education was regarded as the core of all education activities when she was at school. At the time, she told me, the principal, with the help of other teachers in the school management team, was responsible for the running of assemblies, which featured twice a week, on Mondays and Wednesdays. She remembered that they would sing hymns and the principal or whoever was in charge for the day would read from the Bible and guide them in terms of the values encapsulated in the text of the day before ending the assembly with prayer. She specifically remembered Psalms and Proverbs, which lent themselves to values teaching. Her secondary school experience was much the same except that religious education was not quite as formal as it was at primary school. Even though morning assemblies were

compulsory Biblical Studies was optional as was the joining of the Student Christian Movements, which set aside times for prayer and / or other religious observances outside school hours. Each school day was, however, closed with a hymn and a prayer.

Regarding the impact of religious education on her personal and professional life, Nikiwe indicated that it was through religious education that she obtained moral values, including the value of respect because it channelled her growth in a Christian way, infusing her with Christian beliefs and principles. She was adamant that if it were not for the Christian principles she acquired at Christian school and in her community she would have been adversely affected by many life challenges such as peer pressure or teenage pregnancy. She might even have dropped out of school because of these. Instead; her religious education afforded her the opportunity of being a school principal.

Based on the benefits her own Christian education has brought her, Nikiwe believes that religious education is one of the ways in which children could be removed from the streets, places where they could easily be affected by *dangerous life hazards*. Regarding the management of learners who followed religions other than Christianity, Nikiwe mentioned that because morning assemblies were compulsory for everyone, all learners and staff had to obey even though they did not like it. She emphasised that the curriculum in those days (during her childhood) required the teaching of religious education and everybody was supposed to do religious education whether a Christian, Muslim or any other religion.

Nikiwe joined the teaching profession before 1994, as an educator at a rural primary school in the Mpumalanga province. She told me that when religion changes occurred in 1994 as staff, they decided not to force learners to attend morning assemblies any more. However, because 90 per cent of the learners were Christians, parents made it clear that they did not have a problem with the school operating in the Christian way and such decisions were reflected in the school code of conduct. She further indicated that they made sure that they did not force those who believed in other religions to go to assembly but, because it was a primary school, and non-Christians were few, everybody attended assembly even if they did not really believe in the Christian ethos. Because there were so few of them they simply fell in with the majority.

Unlike some of the other principals, admission forms at Nikiwe's school required parents to indicate their religions even if this would not necessarily change the way religious matters were dealt with in the school - assemblies were still run in the Christian way. In 2003 when

the new religion policy was released, Nikiwe had joined a primary township school in the Gauteng province as a Head of Department (HoD). She recalled that the principal made them copies of the national religion policy and the religion policy of the school was drafted in conjunction with this national policy. In spite of that initiative, assemblies continued being Christian in character. Prayers were still said, hymns sung and Scriptures read. As regard the teaching of religion education, lessons focused mostly on Bible reading, with Christian pastors being invited to such lessons, although textbooks had been provided for the teaching of religion education,.

Later, Nikiwe was appointed as school principal at a primary school in a township in the Gauteng province. She indicated that Christian devotions were still the norm in this school: the day would start with prayer, singing of hymns, and Scripture readings; meetings, too, were opened and closed in the same way. Parents who have different beliefs from those of Christians have been asked to advise her of this but no parent has ever shown up to do so even though she knew that the other major faith in her school was African Traditional in nature. Because 60 to 90 per cent of parents, learners and staff were Christians, Christianity was given preference in the school's policy.

Regarding the crafting of the religion policy of the school, Nikiwe indicated that her educators were against the fact that all learners were channelled to Christianity claiming that non-Christians should also be accommodated in the school's policy. She stressed that in response to their demand, the religion policy of the school had an open clause that said, *"Everyone has the right to believe in his own religion"*. Even so, she pointed out, the policy when it came to practice all learners attended the assembly, singing, praying, and reading Scriptures from the Bible.

In terms of the teaching of religion education, Nikiwe related that if an educator told her that he could not teach learners about Christianity because he was an African Traditional believer, she would instruct him that the curriculum directed him to teach about the Christian ethos not about traditional orientations. She further indicated that some educators had a tendency of hiding behind the policy when they did not want to lead morning assemblies and according to her, such behaviour disrupted the programme of the school.

Relating the impact of the religion policy in education, Nikiwe viewed the policy as a symbolic gesture which, although it guarantees equality in terms of religious observances,

allows Christianity to dominate. She further indicated that because they, as implementers of the policy, were never oriented about it, they encounter problems when they try to unpack it to their followers. She explained that in most cases the policy is interpreted to suit the needs of those in authority and that it created a great deal of conflict amongst stakeholders. Even so, when asked to sum up her position regarding the policy she described it as *good* and believed that if well understood, it *could take South Africa far*.

5.3.11 Similarities and differences in Christian principals' experiences

Since the majority of participating principals were Christians and had attended schools and colleges with a strongly Christian ethos it was possible to generalise about their religion-in-education experiences only as far as this particular group as such is concerned. Although qualitative research is not primarily concerned with generalisation but with context-specific descriptions a comparison of the similarities and differences in this group of principals' experiences are important since in the discussion of similarities in their approaches to policy implementation, conclusions were drawn. I therefore point these out in the sub-sections that follow.

5.3.11.1 Similarities

Christian principals who participated in this study grew up, were schooled and trained in Christian communities. They worked in Christian schools as young educators and as school managers. In recalling their childhood experiences with Christian religious education, they remembered the *joy* they experienced when participating in religious gatherings. They remembered feeling pride in their achievement when they were able to recite verses from the Bible, thereby gaining recognition and acknowledgement from those who were present.

Apart from having to attend morning assemblies all the Christian principals also had religious education as an examination subject and indicated that religious content was often included in other subjects. Most of them also mentioned that the marks they obtained in their religious education examinations not only played a role in whether or not they passed a particular standard – now referred to as grades – but was also seen as a “passport” into the next level of education. This could have been because the baptismal certificate was then used in the place of an identity document (ID) since many learners did not at the time have birth certificates and the baptismal certificate could fulfil this role. Their school experience of religion in education was, therefore, a pleasant and positive one.

An analysis of principals' narratives revealed, moreover, that most of them continued their studies of the Bible, in the form of Biblical Studies, when they progressed to higher education (college or university) and that they found this subject as enjoyable as they found religious education and assemblies at school. The opportunity that Biblical Studies gave them to study the Bible in depth seems to have further strengthened and developed the Christian foundation laid at schools. This might well be the reason, suggested in some of the principals' narratives, why their exposure to learners from other religions in higher education institutions could not shake their Christian faith.

Moreover, so it seems from their narratives, their Christian identity was protected in higher education institutions, albeit implicitly because, as more than one of them indicated, the presence of learners whose religions were different – rumoured or observed – was never acknowledged. Contrary to the way it was at school level, though, Christianity was more communal at tertiary level as was obvious from their voluntary involvement in student movements based on the Christian faith and, in some cases, their decision to become Sunday school teachers. This kind of volunteering, as well as their involvement in Christian movements, could be seen as their wanting to preserve and share the joy they got from Christian religious education with others, even when they became educators and / or were promoted to management positions because their Christianity is now *part* of who they are, not something separate from or outside of them.

What is also clear from the Christian principals' narratives is that they view and experience the current religion-in-education approach negatively. They believe that the removal of Christian religious education from the system and the inclusion of all the other religions are primarily responsible for the ill-disciplined learners they have in schools today. They also have a feeling that the freedom and voluntarism of educators when it comes to assembly attendance contributes in educators' negligence of their duty of care. According to them, ever since the provision of the clause by the Constitution, SASA and the national religion policy, educators no longer want to be part of the assembly. They therefore regard it as their role and responsibility to discourage the teaching of other religions and to nurture and indoctrinate learners to believe that only Christian religious education through Bible knowledge should be taught at schools.

Lastly but not least, most of the Christian principals tend to interpret the legislation and policies in a way that suit their needs. They took advantage of their educators' ignorance and

the SGBs' illiteracy and deconstructed from the legislation only the clause that seems to suit their own interests and sugar-coated religion policies of schools. Policies are thus administratively (or technically) congruent with the expectations of the State, but are only symbolic as religious practices in schools still continue unaltered.

5.3.11.2 Differences

The primary difference in the schooling of the Christian principals can be found in the fact that the schools they attended were under the administration of race-based education departments. Both the two white and the two coloured principals attended schools falling under the control and administration of the House of Assembly (white schools), and of the House of Representatives (Coloured schools). The schools attended by black principals were under the control and administration of either the Department of Education and Training or one of the nine Bantustan (Homeland) Departments of Education.

Some of the black principals' narratives seem to suggest that in their schools a great deal of attention was devoted to the erosion of African Traditional beliefs in favour of Christianity. This strategy, so it would seem from their narratives, was not completely successful since many of them admitted that the ancestors still have an influence in [their] lives. They therefore have to be honoured and respected by performing a number of rituals on their honour. Even John, a Coloured principal, seems to have adopted the African belief in the forefathers and their influence in his daily life because he grew up in an African community and was initiated into their ancestral beliefs.

Another factor that seems to have resulted in Christian principals' views on religious diversity and freedom could be the extent of their exposure to people of other religions. Mark, for example, having furthered his studies in London, where he was exposed to *54 different cultures* no longer believed that Christian *values* were the only ones that were good. In fact, what he realised was that there is a *golden thread of common values*, e.g. *team work, peace, space, acceptance, and forgiveness* – running through all religions. One could therefore expect Mark to be more willing than other principals to accommodate religious diversity in his school. Whether this was the case is indicated later in this chapter.

From an instructional leadership perspective, it is noteworthy that some of the principals were totally oblivious of what was offered by their educators during Life Orientation periods where teaching on religious diversity is supposed to be a compulsory part. Those who did

know what was offered during Life Orientation indicated that Christianity was promoted to the detriment of other religions. Unlike other principals, Nikiwe, for instance, deceive educators by telling them that the curriculum instructs them to teach about Christianity but, not about religious orientations such as African Traditions. This is an absolute misconception and misinterpretation of the religion policy and / or curriculum.

5.3.12 Conclusions

What the above narratives reveal is that almost all the Christian principals viewed and experienced Christian religious education positively, even those who straddle the Christianity and African Traditional belief divide. How the duality of the latter's belief affects their ability to implement or mediate the implementation of a multi-faith religion policy in their schools is addressed later in this chapter. As indicated above, whether or not Mark's commitment to Christian values played a role in the way he interacted with people in London whose religious orientations differed from his and whether either his Christianity or his exposure to other religions influenced his approach to the implementation of religion policy in schools is also revealed later in this chapter.

5.4 Common trends in all the principals' religious experiences

The purpose of section 5.3 was to tell the stories of principals who participated in this study. I then identified the similarities and differences between their experiences as indicated in these stories. Using these stories as basis for my conclusions about the impact that their religious experiences had on their role as implementers and/or mediators of the implementation of the new religion in education policy' religious experiences, the emergence of common trends in principals' religious experiences were discovered. Discussion of these trends will now form part of section 5.4.

5.4.1 Commonalities in principals' past experiences

What is evident from their narratives is that religious instruction had been both an overt and a covert component of all the principals' educational experiences and that, in general, such instruction have had an enduring effect on their lives and on the choices they made, past and present. While their recollections of religious activities – instructional as well as social - were mostly positive, this was not always the case. There were times when some of them felt isolated, less than and / or different from others. For the purposes of my study it is important

to identify what it was that made them feel this way because what they experienced on an emotional and psychological level might influence their current attitudes to religion in education and, by implication, the way in which they executed their role as implementers or mediators of new religion policies in their schools. The possible impact of these feelings is discussed in sub-section (5.2.3).

5.4.1.1 Positive past experiences

A comparison of participating principals' positive experiences with religion indicates that they felt that they had benefited either externally or internally from their involvement in religious activities and / or from their commitment to a particular faith. I therefore decided to discuss their positive experiences in terms of common threads running through the two kinds of benefits they mentioned, i.e. external and internal.

In terms of the first category – *external benefits* – indications are that principals were of the opinion that the religious instruction they received as well as their involvement in a particular religion contributed to their educational, economic, social and career development. More specifically, they were adamant that it was the religious values and principles that were drilled into them that not only protected them from going astray but also helped them move up in their profession. These benefits are succinctly captured in Nikiwe's affirmation that:

Christian moral values played an important role in my leadership experience. I have tasted all the ladders of leadership. I was a classroom teacher where I was leading learners, then I became a senior teacher meaning that you are a teacher who advises other teachers. From being the senior teacher, I became a head of department where I was heading a particular department. Then I was the deputy principal assisting the principal in the managerial activities. I was then appointed as a principal.

In terms of the second category – *internal benefits* – all the principals who participated in my study, but especially those who attended Christian schools, indicated that their religion in education experiences built character. This view is captured in Nikiwe's categorical statement that "If one was not educated in a Christian school, or if one was not coming from a Christian background, obviously, one would have been affected by many life challenges such as peer pressure, obviously, teenage pregnancy".

In the case of Christian principals character building was associated with the inculcation of Christian values like respect and love for others in them while they were still children. These values were taught to them by means of maxims like *you shall not steal, you shall not commit*

adultery, and you shall not murder, but also by making them memorise and recite pieces from Scripture. They were taught that these values represented standards of acceptable social behaviour, and as such had to be the norm rather than the exception. In Tefo's words, religious instruction was "morally good because it showed us the way, love for people, respect for other people, you know, this I believe is the correct way of doing things; this is the correct way of living. So, that is the reason that I say, what I learnt then, it is still part of me".

Gertrude's experience, as a practising Hindu who yearned to be part of a Christian group, in the end adopted neither of these religions as a compass for the way she related to others or for the way in which she practised her career. In her personal life, though, she was determined to inculcate the Hindu values and principles she was taught as a child to her own children even though they attended Christian-oriented schools. As indicated earlier Gertrude was exposed to Christianity and Hinduism simultaneously when she was still very young, playing the piano at *Christian' congregations on Sundays* before being picked up by her father, who took her *to the temple for worship*. Her early exposure to Christian church communities, coupled with her later exposure to Christian student groups at university, gave her an appreciation for the spiritual moral, religious values and behaviour underpinning the Christian faith. This appreciation, which she attributes to her *liberal upbringing* seems to have been the stimulus for a shift of the way in which she now views herself, not in terms of what she believes religion-wise but in terms of who and what she is, namely an educator.

Paul demonstrated an even greater willingness than Gertrude to embrace other religions, first through his transition from Hinduism to Christianity, and then from Christianity to Islam but not for the same reasons as Gertrude and certainly not in the same way.

Whereas Gertrude's consciousness shifted gradually, probably caused both by her early exposure to more than one faith and her feelings of isolation later on, Paul's moves from one religion to another were mostly pragmatic, informed by a deep-seated desire to escape from the poverty of his childhood days. In addition he, like Gertrude, might have felt like an outsider and his moves to different religions where there seemed to be a spirit of togetherness might have been his attempt to become an "insider". This feeling is best illustrated by the fact that for the first time in his life he felt valued and appreciated, if only because the principal used to consult him for advice and suggestions relating to the implementation of religion policy. Paul's courage on the other hand, was built so much that he would also approach the principal in cases where he noticed some pitfalls in this regard.

In contrast to Gertrude's view of herself as an educator, rather than as a Hindu, and Paul's pragmatic eclecticism, Christian school principals participating in my study viewed themselves as educators whose mission it was to ensure that the same Christian values instilled in them when they were at schools are instilled in the learners whom they taught. In a sense, therefore, they viewed themselves as missionaries of the Christian faith. Connie affirmed, for example, her belief that "if more of our educators follow Bible principles or Christianity they would experience some differences in their lives because we are the role models of the learners we educate, so they come to school to learn something out of us and follow that example because we have to live by example. Whatever we say and do must be a way of life."

Mark's experience reflects elements of both the Christian and the originally Hindu oriented principals. Having spent his school years in South Africa, in Christian-faith based institutions; his experience was pretty similar to those of other Christian principals in my study. However, when he moved to London to further his studies all of this changed. Suddenly he was exposed to people with widely different religious orientations and yet, according to him, all these orientations were accommodated in the same institution without any conflict occurring. According to Mark, the golden thread every time in all those meetings included the focus on team work, peace, space, acceptance, and forgiveness. Whenever, for example, Muslims or Christians had their festivals to celebrate, the whole school would celebrate together.

5.4.1.2 Negative past experiences

A comparison of participating principals' negative experiences with religion in education in the past indicates that these had an effect mainly on their social lives and their self-esteem. Quite a few of the principals in the study indicated that they sometimes felt isolated or distanced from people with religious orientations different from their own. The confined religious environments in which they lived left them little choice but to form relationships with people in the vicinity whose backgrounds were basically the same as theirs.

This is very clear from Paul's recollection that, "...at that time, you know you do not make friends with people from a different religion. There were so many religions around, but I did not really understand or learn to associate with people from other religions". Because they knew little or nothing of the customs, beliefs, and rituals of others, there was a lot of suspicion and intolerance within the community. Neo recalled that their educators were

emphasising Christianity as the true religion. If a learner would come with or wear anything associated with other religions, parents of such a learner would be called and the learner had to stop the practice immediately. Sello also recalled that “...this Muslim committee member who also persuaded [the school] to be given a slot, [based] on the argument that there are also Muslim children in our school. We once gave him an opportunity but it was not appreciated. You could just see from their response that they do not enjoy it as they do with Christianity. So, such opportunity was stopped”.

Some of the principals, like Gertrude and John, were aware of the existence of other orientations and beliefs even as children. John recalled that:

It was in town where we saw different shapes of buildings and one would ask, why this one has a cross on top and that one has a cap sort of on top. It was then that we heard about Muslims and Christians. And at school level you would also ask, what is Muslims? Then they would tell us that they are those guys with caps on their heads and we would also see them at the secondary school where they would leave school and went to Mosque may be to pray and stuff like that. But, it was basically Christianity all the way.

In addition to their sense of isolation from others and the resultant loneliness which religious differences brought about in them when they were children they also seemed to be frightened that if they were to mix with others the consequences would be dire. Some of them admitted that they were afraid that they were not welcome in groups with different orientations to their own and might therefore be rejected. Gertrude’s admission that she wanted to join a Christian group but felt she could not *because there wasn’t any open invitation* is a case in point.

Principals’ narratives indicated that the fear of being rejected or ostracised forced them to lead double lives. This was the case with John, who claimed to be a Christian while continuing to perform traditional religious rituals. Fear of punishment was another factor that could have led to false, or pseudo-conversions. That this might well have been the case as illustrated in Sello’s recollection of the consequences they had to face if they *did not know certain parts of the Bible*. According to him, this would result in their being caned, not only because *corporal punishment was still being used* but also because the Bible urges parents not to *spare the rod*. “We were therefore prepared to learn all the verses maybe because of fear of corporal punishment”.

Paul, too, who was supposedly a Hindu, remembers that they were punished if they did not attend *compulsory* celebrations or perform the prescribed Hindu rituals. This was not the only

reason why he pretended to subscribe to the Hindu faith, though. He also felt like an outsider because, according to him, one had to be wealthy to be a Hindu, and his family “did not have money, we did not have things and everyday was a struggle”. Even so, he kept up the pretence that he was a devout Hindu until he went to high school. From the perspective of an outsider like him, Christianity seemed very attractive because Christians were “popular in my community”. That was the main reason for most of us to convert to Christianity”. Given his burning desire to be “popular” amongst, or at least accepted by, others it is not surprising that Paul then converted to Christianity. According to Paul, Christians’ popularity was due to their ability to heal others. One could imagine that this, too, would attract Paul to Christianity because to someone like him, whose circumstances made him feel powerless, this would be an opportunity to feel good about himself.

5.4.2 Principals’ experience of changes to religion in education

All Christian principals in this study became educators in Christian-faith based schools a long time before they became school principals, with much of their childhood experiences resonating with their experiences as young educators. In recalling his experience, Mpho remembered that, “...at the school where I started teaching, there were assemblies and most of the staff members, as you would know that South Africans, we are Christians; assemblies were run in a Christian way. Every learner had to attend, whether subscribing to Christianity or not, they had to attend assemblies.” Neo’s experience was similar in that “...the practice that I found was of Christianity. We would go to the assembly where Christian songs were sung, prayer was said and the daily duty would begin”.

The new religion in education policy theoretically came into effect in 2003. The primary tenet on which the policy rested was that, in a constitutional democracy like South Africa, religion in education policies must reflect the core values of the Constitution, namely a common citizenship, human rights, equality, equity, freedom from discrimination and freedom of religion, conscience, thought, belief and opinion (*see Chapter 3*). By implication, the new religion-in-education policy did not promote or protect the religious interests of a particular faith. Instead, its aim was, on the one hand, to promote constitutional values while protecting everybody’s right to religious freedom. On the other hand, it wanted to use religion in education to attain specific objectives (i.e. tolerance); exposing learners to different religions, in order to make them more tolerant of those whose religious orientations differed from their own, for example.

It was probably to this purpose that paragraph 34 of the National Policy on Religion and Education (2003) provides for the occasional invitation of guest facilitators to teach religion education in schools. However, as indicated by the majority of principals in my study this seldom happened. Nikiwe remembered that they “used to have eh...pastors that would visit the school. They would come and help the school. In terms of that day the pastor would talk to us about a particular topic and from there the pastor would go”. Connie, too, remembered that “sometimes the leader from our religion would come and assemble with our children at that time” but Neo could not remember that they ever invited any pastors, ministers or religious leaders from other religions. Mostly those that were coming were Christians.

Although they were not all principals at the time the ANC came into power, the principals who participated in my study all realised that policy changes were imminent. They knew that the Constitution, the Bill of Rights and the South African Schools Act (84 of 1996) accorded all religions equal status, also in schools; hence, they expected changes to the religion-in-education policy. This notwithstanding, their narratives indicate that most of their schools remained essentially Christian-based, even after the new policy came into effect, although not necessarily for the same reasons. John remembered, for example, that at the school where he taught at the time “everything was being done a Christian way. That is why I say, my entire career has been informed by Christianity”.

In Sello’s school the principal simply “did not implement it. Eh...his argument was that the school was of a Christian character, and the majority of parents and the learners were Christians. Therefore, Christianity would be given preference”. This was also the case in the school where Mpho taught. According to him, the culture remained the same, with assemblies still being run in a Christian way. Every learner whether subscribing to religions other than Christianity or not, had to attend assemblies. In Siphos school religious changes didn’t pose a problem...nobody cared about them. It was just business as usual. “Teachers, principal, the community; we were not concerned about the changes in religion. We just continued with morning assemblies”. He did remember, though, that religious education was no longer compulsory. One would either take it as a subject or..., it was no longer compulsory like before. Morning devotions were no longer compulsory... It was a matter of voluntary participation, individual choice. Baptismal certificate also was no longer pre-requisite for furthering studies but, the matter of beliefs. The same happened in Connie’s school: “Still there is not much change really, except that religion was totally cut off from the daily school

program. Since then, it is expressed like a prayer at the assembly. Everything seems to be as it has been before.”

Similar practices were experienced by Gertrude and Paul (both having been born into the Hindu faith). In acknowledgement of the core constitutional rights and values such as equality and freedom from unfair discrimination, including discrimination against any race or religion, all schools, including former Model C schools, which were Christian in character, had to open their doors to educators and learners of colour. It was on this basis that Gertrude and Paul were appointed as educators in Christian-faith based schools. Gertrude, who was appointed to a teaching position in an ex-Model C school soon after she had completed her teacher training, found that religious devotions were dealt with, a Christian way. Later, when she moved to an Indian school, she found that “religion was dealt with in exactly the same way as while I was still schooling. We acknowledged Hinduism and Islam but no other religion”. Paul, who was also appointed as an educator in a school which had traditionally been Christian, also found that a lot of school activities and the meetings were dealt with in a Christian way. This did not bother him because although he was a Muslim at the time, he was once a Christian at some stage, so, he “understood Christianity, it was not a problem for me so, I just fitted in”.

Gertrude recalled that, when she was called for an interview in a Christian-faith based school in the Gauteng province, she was asked whether she would teach Bible Studies. She said she would. Like Paul, whose multiple conversions to different religions were informed by the possibility of external benefits, she would benefit from agreeing to the request.

I remember when I started teaching, the only way I could get a post; was for me to teach Bible Studies. And I said, ‘Yes I will.’ So, I studied the Bible because I needed a job, I needed to be in the Gauteng province. It was a Christian-faith based school and I was the first teacher of colour. Although I was not a Christian, I wanted the post. I knew my abilities, I think I knew I was a good teacher, I knew I believed in my teaching and I could teach anything, even if it means another religion.

It would seem from these words that she had already regarded herself as an educator *per se*, not as a missionary who could use education to promote her own religion. In fact, she categorically stated that, having been exposed to Christian sermons and practices in her childhood, she did not find it difficult “to pick up the Bible and start teaching the children...I never ever at any stage thought I needed to change the religion”. Nor did she have any concerns about it affecting her own religious orientation, emphatically stating that her *faith*

was never shaken. She admitted that “initially it was stressful (because) I was learning a totally different religion” but, realising that parents might not like a person of a different faith teaching their children Bible Studies, Gertrude made every effort to teach the subject to the best of her ability. “I didn’t want to teach them wrong things. I didn’t want to misinterpret the Bible or I didn’t want to put the wrong person or the wrong verse. I studied it like I was studying at school. And I think I secured myself”.

In separating her faith from her teaching Gertrude validated her claim that she was an educator first and a believer second. The transformational shift that occurred during her childhood age was therefore authentic, not just a means of accruing external benefits because of her religious “openness” and “tolerance”. This is probably why Christian parents whose children were in her Bible Education class came to trust her. “What I liked with those parents was that even though they could see that I am a Hindu as you could hardly get an Indian Christian, they never ever complained on anything that I taught because that was my main concern. They didn’t see me being possible to indoctrinate their children to Hinduism or anything like that. I think it was because I focused on my teaching as that was the only subject I taught.”

Interestingly enough, Gertrude decided not to send her children to an Indian school. Instead, she enrolled them at the school where she was then teaching even when “it was made clear that, if I wanted to come to the school, it is a Christian-faith based school, and I knew that my children were going to get a Christian education”. She enrolled them at this school “because I was far away from Hindu [schools so], my children were more brought up with the Christians and I knew that I had to work hard as the parent to reinforce my Hindu education at home. So, they had to learn both religions. I had to make sure that we observed religious days, we spoke about the religious gods and about the values.”

If the principals who participated in my study are representative of principals across the country one could infer from these narratives that, although the new religion-in-education policy officially came into effect in 2003, few, if any, schools have implemented it as envisaged. I investigated some of the reasons for this, as expressed in principals’ narratives, in the sub-section that follows (5.5.1). Even so, there are some indications in their narratives that Christianity was losing its domination over other religious groups. Scriptures were read but no longer given much attention and time like before. “It is like we would sing; read may

be for a fewer minutes then make announcements. Perhaps because of this learners from other religions, no learners would come and say, I am a Hindu, I am a Muslim,” (Nikiwe).

5.4.3 *Negative attitudes to the new religion-in-education policy*

It took almost ten years from the time that the ANC became the new government of South Africa for a new National Policy on Religion and Education to be released for implementation. This was due to vehement resistance from many quarters – parents, teachers, religious leaders, and even some politicians – sometimes for the same reasons, sometimes not (see Chapter 3).

The school principals who participated in this study were either negative about the new religion-in-education policy or were doubtful about the possibility of effective implementation, but for different reasons. Mark felt that, by forcing schools to implement the policy, the government was provocatively interfering in the running of schools. “Forcing a different style, a different way of doing things, causes conflict which tolls the other school activities and we are not happy with the enforcement that is going on in our schools”. Tefo agreed that the policy should have been selective. “There are multi-cultural schools; I think those are the schools to be affected by the policy in one way or another. Then there is this school, with learners who share the same home language, who grew up in one and the same community where they share same practices. Why then does the government bring this policy to them?” Tom, who like Mark, looked at policy implementation from a management perspective, initially had doubts as to how to implement this policy and deal with demands of various religions. “One of the completely strange things to me was the request that we had to release 35 Muslim children to leave for Mosque at 12:00 on Fridays”.

The narrative of participating principals who were still educators at the time the policy was first to be implemented suggest, moreover, that the principals of schools where they were teaching then responded in different ways to the new religion-in-education policy and its implementation. At Mpho’s school, for example, parents and learners were never informed of the changes to the religion-in-education policy. “We do not really talk about religious matters to parents, that they can excuse their children from morning devotions or what, to be honest with you that does not happen even to date”. The same happened at Sello’s school the principal did not implement it. His argument was that the school was of a Christian character,

and the majority of parents and the learners were Christians. Therefore, Christianity would be given preference.

At Tefo's school the principal did communicate the changes to educators, leaving the decision whether or not to inform the parents about it to them and the decision to implement it or not to the parents. He had a *provision* though: there had to be educators in the school who knew enough about these religions to teach them. "If there are those of you who believe in Islamic, Hindu (from India), Buddhist (somewhere in the East) religions or are knowledgeable about these religions, we can as well inform the parents, to see as to whether they can be accommodated. Those of you who feel like to pass these African Traditional religions to learners, talk to me, I will inform the parents. If they say 'thumbs up' then it is fine". The principal then invited parents and educators to divulge their religious faith so that they could be accommodated at school but, according to Tefo, "not even a single parent or educator came. All what they kept on saying was that: going to the assembly is against my religion. So, we continued everything in a Christian way."

Various factors could have informed these differences in approach. It may have been that principals were simply trying to avoid conflict. It might have been that they were sending out the message that they were in charge of their schools and the way these should be managed – resistance to change, in other words. It might simply be that they understood "freedom of religion" differently, as the right to choose which religion should be promoted in their schools. What is suggested in the reasons participating principals gave for the way they dealt with this issue is that they were not the only ones who felt uncomfortable with the changes being imposed from above: indications are that educators and parents also resisted the implementation of the new policy. This is also suggested in Tefo's recollection that, *as a parent*, he wanted his children to have a similar schooling experience to the one he had had because he believes it made him the person he is today. "I was taught religious education. I am what I am today because of what I was taught in those lessons. So, I want the same information to be passed on to my children".

Some educators, according to principals' narratives, openly resisted the policy, some supported it, and some tried to use it to their own advantage. At Siphos's school educators, although being aware that morning devotions were no longer compulsory, all attended the assembly... There was a timetable for morning devotions but it was not compulsory. "Well...yes, as long as I could tell the committee that no, I don't feel comfortable with this

function, there was no problem. But we never had any and the assembly was still hymn, scripture reading and prayer and it was conducted by us teachers.”

At Tefo’s school, on the other hand, educators and learners boycotted the attendance of assemblies, arguing that attendance was against their religious beliefs. He recalled that “...before 1994, as teachers we attended the assembly where we would stand in front of the learners to maintain order... Came 1994, the teacher would say, ‘I’m not a Christian, do not expect me to stand there or even read a scripture’. That is when things started to go haphazard” Sello’s experience was almost the same. “In the past we used to be responsible for leading the assembly, meaning that we would be expected to open the Bible. Things changed after 1994. There were certain teachers who would quote the Act and say that the new Act says freedom of religion. And then my freedom is that I subscribe to the traditional religion for Africans”.

Principals continued adherence to Christian principles, and their reluctance to change religious practices at their schools, could be ascribed to a number of factors. In the first instance they were taught from an early age that Christianity was the only way to live, that *African Traditional religion is not the way to go*. The way Christianity was taught was specifically aimed at instilling this notion, i.e. to indoctrinate them to believe what someone else regarded as the truth. Allied to this is the way other religions were presented and / or interpreted by their teachers. Some of the participating principals admitted that they did

...not know whether we were brain washed or what. But we would be asked, ‘how can you spend your time pleasing and praying to the ancestors? Do you think they have got any powers over your life? Some of them you do not even know, but, you think they have got a bearing in what is going on today.’ You know, it’s a kind of a religion that very few of us can stand up and say, ‘I am one of them and this is what we do as part of our rituals.

This admission by Tefo dovetailed with John’s experience, as told to me during the interview.

I still have some signs of cuts on my chest. You know, we went to eh..., a sangoma where we were given these cuts..., I also used to hear some of my friends claiming that, ‘no, no, at our house we do not go to church, we actually do not believe (sic) in such stuff’ and they would show us some cuts on their bodies ‘look here, they cut me’ and they said I must not go to church.

Another factor that could have had a substantive effect on their thoughts and actions could be the impact of forceful incidents viewed and experienced by some of the principals. John recalled, for example, that Muslims who would leave for Mosque on Fridays would be

corporally punished and caned for not attending the assembly or being late for assembly. Siphso echoed that: “Mm...We had no choice at that time, because it was Christian education unlike now and we did not have a problem because we had no choice.”

All the Christian principals in this study also believed that they were who and where they were personally and professionally at the time of my inquiry because of their Christian ethos. This was categorically stated by Siphso, who told me that “although by that time I couldn’t see the effect it had in my life, now that I am older I can see that it shaped me to be what I am, I mean as a religious person.” Sello actually became quite emotional when he told me about the influence his faith had had on his life and this was reflected in the tone of his voice when he said, “Oh yes...it had a very...positive spiritual influence in my personal life. Eh...besides, the fact that I, myself, am a Christian, I think I can still quote certain verses that I learned during my childhood days.”

The tone used by Christian principals in this study when expressing the role that Christian religious education had played in their lives indicated their commitment to Christianity. In fact, their commitment is such that they still regard it as their mission to live and relate to others in accordance with their Christian principles. Neo, for instance, indicated that he was

...always sensitive to the way my colleagues behave. In case I hear someone insulting, even if they are playing, I would call them and request them to respect one another. So, I’m sensitive about the values that we have to promote in our schools. With me respect would mean ‘not insulting’ one another, not talking in a harsh way to one another, but treating one another in a human way and I view that to be from the Christian values.

In so doing, principals believe, they are not only promoting values such as “respect” but are also protecting human rights such as “human dignity” amongst educators as well as learners. Unwavering commitment to Christianity was also evident from Connie’s words:

Yes, Christian religious education added a greatest value in my life because without it, I do not think my life would be as it is right now, as happy as I am now. It gives me a broad outlook of life in general because it opens a way that one would know that ‘There is God’ and without believing in Him and following His instructions, one’s life is totally miserable. And it has also made a big change in my life as a student because while I was a child I was taught about Christianity and God’s word, then I truly experienced great difference in behaviour as compared to today’s generation.

The ethos implied in Connie's words were reflected in Mark's narration of how Christian values helped his family go through the transition from apartheid to the new democratic dispensation.

The values that we learned through Christian faith played a significant role to me and my friends during the transition period. We were taught how we should live amongst others, how we should change and adapt with the world, as well as forgiveness at that stage where people were really angry with National Party. In my household, my brothers and I were taught to focus on what is true and correct, understand that change has to come, and it is taking place. It was not just the matter of saying, 'Halleluiah, Jesus Christ' but, to realise God's purpose with our lives, how people should work and live together and how to pass through that transition phase.

Mark, like all the other Christian principals interviewed, regarded the Christian ethos as his life compass, a compass that directed his contact with playmates, family members and classmates at school.

I would say from religious point of view, Christian religious education had a large impact in me and our community at large. I became confident in talking about Christian faith. It created a bond, for example, in the rugby field, with my mates playing the game and then in the classroom. The same bond manifested in my household and these would include issues such as praying together, having dinner together, and going to church together.

In some cases, though, it could have been the external benefits to be derived from claiming to be a Christian that could have made them behave and think the way they did, John's words suggest that this might well have been the case.

Now, as we speak, I have just bought a new car and my mother was the first person to ride in the car, she prayed in that car and since my father has passed on, we went to his grave and showed him the car. He needs to know that I bought a new car and I asked him for his blessings.

Although they did not explicitly feature as beliefs and values that had an impact on their lives in one way or another, references to traditional religious beliefs and values kept on popping up in principals' narratives. Sello admitted, for instance, that "...yes..., the ancestors still have eh... the influence in our lives. They therefore have to be honoured and respected by performing a number of rituals on their honour" but stated adamantly that today's learners are missing out on the benefits of Christian religious education: "I just pity those learners of today where religious education is no longer being offered because they are missing out on those" (Sello).

Some educators, like John, resisted the policy because of their own Christian orientation. “When I was a teacher at my school, everything was being done a Christian way. That is why I say, my entire career has been informed by Christianity and we took it for granted that since we are Christians, we have to promote Christianity”. Others, like Neo and Sello, believed that the removal of Christian religious education from the curriculum has deprived learners of the opportunity to acquire its moral values. Connie goes one step further, linking the removal of Christian religious education to the current lack of discipline in schools. “Yah, in fact the discipline has actually gone worse. Eh, we struggle with discipline at school and children do not seem to be religious any more. They think religious matters are only for adults. Before, they had that exposure to religious education which is very sad not to have it any more.” Siphso agrees wholeheartedly. “When the Christian values were being taught to the children, they behaved in a good way unlike now at the present. If I have to compare the present dispensation and the past, I can see a great difference in the moral of the learners. Yes, it is so different; we are having it very tough.”

Given their own, “Christian”, reasons for resisting the policy change it is not surprising that participating principals regarded other educators’ resistance to the continuation of past practices as an excuse not to attend assemblies, either because they felt incompetent to lead assemblies, or they were embarrassed about the fact that they belonged to other religions. John remembered “...this educator who would hide behind religion for late coming. He would come and stand at the gate, late and said that he does not believe in the way assemblies were conducted because we were preaching and reading from the Bible and he does not believe in that”. Others simply used it as an excuse to avoid their responsibilities. This is the reason most cited in participating principals’ narratives. This was explicitly stated by Nikiwe when she told me that they (i.e. the SMT) “came to realise that the educator was hiding; he did not want to go to assembly. We realised that because sometimes when he was happy, he would join us at the assembly”.

Lastly, as regards the way parents responded to the new religion-in-education policy, indications from participating principals’ narratives are that most parents just kept quiet. According to Neo, they had parents who were politicians who would just keep quiet and say no word. Others were afraid that their children would be victimised if they admitted that they did not subscribe to the dominant, Christian, religion in the school, hence they pretended that nothing had changed. Sometimes they feared victimisation from the side of the principal,

sometimes from educators, and sometimes from other parents belonging to the religious majority.

5.4.4 *Positive attitudes towards the new religion-in-education policy*

The only two principals who were not openly negative about the new religion in education policy were Gertrude and Paul. As indicated earlier, they, in contrast with the other principals, had at times felt isolated or marginalised because they did not belong to what was then the dominant, “Christian” community. Gertrude recalled that the way in which they were brought up and schools that they went to resulted in their “generally stay[ing] with people that are common to us with similar background”. One would not, as Paul indicated, make friends with people from different religions. They longed to associate with children from other religions, but feared rejection. “We would feel like we could join the Christian group, but, we couldn’t because there wasn’t any open invitation,” said Gertrude. Their situation, though challenging, taught them greater openness to religions other than theirs, an attitude that enabled them to adapt to different teaching / learning environments. Because of this, perhaps, they tend to be less negative about the new policy. To them, the greater equality between religions, at a policy level at least, would ensure that today’s children would be spared their negative experiences. The new policy would allow them to create a different type of environment for the children who attended their schools, and environment where free association was the norm.

5.5 Impact of principals’ experiences on policy implementation

In view of the fact that all twelve principals who participated in my study were part-time university students pursuing their studies in the field of Education Management and Policy studies it was assumed that they would be able to apply their theoretical knowledge of policy management to the implementation of the new religion-in-education policy at their schools. It was assumed that principals’ childhood, school and further education as well as their experience of religion in education as young educators would have had a significant effect on the manner in which they dealt with the implementation of religion policies at their schools. Whether or not this assumption was correct is the focus of this section. Before drawing any conclusions in this regard I therefore first describe the way in which these principals actually dealt with the implementation of religion-in-education policy. Having done so, I relate their past experiences to the way they thought about and responded to decisions regarding

implementation in order to determine whether or not the former – i.e. their past experiences – had an impact on the latter – the way in which they dealt with the new religion in education policy. Where there is evidence of such influence I indicate whether their past experience resulted in their resisting, sub-contracting or mediating policy change, paying attention to the strategies they used to manage conflict in this regard.

Research suggests that different managers opt for different strategies in order to manage policy development and the conflicts associated with this process. Some resist or ignore the policy, some sub-contract it while yet others rely on the services of a mediator (see Chapter 2). Participating principals' narratives reveal that in most cases they did not implement the religion policy as they should have, either because they did not know how to or because the training they received from both the department and the university did not equip them with the skills to do so. That a lack of skills could be the reason is suggested by Nikiwe, who claimed that *the policies just come and there are no people to unpack them*. Indications from the narratives of other participants suggest that they were trained, i.e. that they were told what was required of them and how to go about doing what they were expected to but they chose to ignore it. Neo's narrative is a case in point. According to him, they attended different courses where they were told that everyone has the right to freedom of religion, but practically, "when we come to the school, we would want learners to practice Christianity. We would emphasise the point of assembly attendance and wanted them to sing Christian songs". Fact of the matter is that most schools and meetings still open and close with a prayer, Scriptures are read at the assembly, and hymns are sung simply because that is the way it was done in the past.

I found the system in place, the way religion was dealt with remained the same, Siphso reported. I was used to the same situation. I was then satisfied with the way the school operated. Also in our SGB meetings, we opened our meetings with a prayer. In our parents' meetings we would sing a Christian song and parents would pray and then because I am also a Christian, I would quote some Bible verses to strengthen my point of view the practice that was highly appreciated by parents, Neo added. From Monday to Friday, according to Siphso, we have morning assembly. We sing hymns and the teacher would call one learner to the front and read the Scripture after which he would make some explanations. That is what we believe is the way of school life.

Another reason for principals not implementing the policy as envisaged by the Department of Education, according to the literature I reviewed, is principals' attachment to their positions of power as school "managers". As indicated in previous chapters, the South African Schools

Act (Act 84 of 1996) mandates the involvement of various stakeholders in school governance. It would seem, however, as if school principals, who have been steeped in authoritarian practices for years, find it difficult to adopt a more democratic and participatory style of management as required by this Act. Sello was adamant that not all the parents understand what was meant by the new approach of the SGB because they were used to the old school committees which were not so democratically elected because the principal would just identify one old man or woman and make them part of school committee and they will serve for many years. So, the parents were still used to that and they did not understand that this new approach was based on democracy.

It is not necessarily because principals are unwilling to implement the religion-in-education policy; perhaps they have not been trained in collaborative and participative decision making. In their narratives, Tom mentioned that he would **inform** non-Christian parents that their schools subscribe to the Christian faith but that they should feel free to invite their religious leaders to come and address their children as part of their different religious observances. Mark, in agreeing with Tom's recollection stated that: "At the '**initial interview**' for admissions at the school, we would tell the parents that this is the Christian school where Christian faith is practised so that at least they are aware though that does not discontinue the admission of children". The manner and the level at which the conversation takes place clearly indicates no room either for debates or objection. It is either that the parent obeyed or he forfeits the space. Also, participating principals often view other stakeholder groupings, especially parents, as incapable or illiterate and in so doing, ignore the Act. Mpho's observation is that parents do not actively participate in decision-making processes, ascribes it to the fact that "most of our parents really are not so much interested in what is happening in schools. So, when you give their children what they do not believe in during the day...in the evening they, as parents give them something they feel is good for them. They do not care".

At the other end of the scale, parents had no legal authority to interfere or participate in school governance matters in the past and, moreover, considered school principals to be the only people with the knowledge and authority to make decisions. Because of this, according to Sello, to date, the parents or the SGB are not involved in the drafting of religion policy: it depends on the school principal mostly. "We explained the religion policy at the school

governing body level but, there was nothing that they said in that regard because em..... Christianity is still given an upper hand”.

Other factors that might affect the extent to which school principals involve stakeholders in school matters are professional cultures and common interests. Often the interests and culture of educators and schools conflict with those of parents, especially parents who sit on the SGB and therefore occupy a very powerful position in schools. John illustrated this by describing the way in which policies are developed and implemented at his school. “The SGB made it clear that the school policy need to accommodate other religions”. In spite of this decision, John made a vow as the policy implementer that “unless the parent comes and explains to us in a form of a letter from Mosque that the learner is actually a committed Muslim and he should be permitted to attend mosque, we would not include that particular religion in the school’s policy. Up until such proof comes; we will practice Christianity, no matter what.” This practice clearly indicates that the entire responsibility for religion policy implementation has been appropriated by school principals and their management teams.

Conflict is inevitable when people work together. It is more than likely to occur, though, when stakeholder groupings with diverse ideas, goals, values; beliefs and needs have to work together in the development of a common goal, like the development and / or implementation of school policies. Conflict occurred at the schools where John and some of the other principals in this study played their support role in the formulation of religion policy. John, for instance, told the SGB that they had to indicate in (the) policy that religious observances should be free and attendance to them should be voluntary. They said, “No, no, no, wait, what are you actually saying? In terms of our school code of conduct, all learners must attend the assembly regardless of what they and their parents believe in”.

It is when conflicts like these occur that the school principal should be willing and able to resolve them in such a way that the smooth running of the school is not being compromised, ideally through mediation (PAM, 2003). In Mark’s school, for example, if they see that the preferred mode of dealing with the SGB elections is not running smoothly, there are hiccups or there are conflicts, “we bring the matter back in a forum. We re-assess, we amend and then we continue. That is why the policies are not constant but, evolving depending on what is happening to the school”. This is not the case in all the schools, though. Participating principals’ narratives indicate that most of them try to avoid or prevent conflict related to religious differences erupting in their schools by not involving parents in religious matters.

According to Neo, they do not bring religion issues in such a task. “We just allow the opportunity to those who have come in to serve as the SGB of the school. We do not mention anything in relation to religion”.

Their narratives revealed, moreover, that autocracy in terms of SGB elections still prevailed. Principals in this study viewed and experienced their role in this regard very much as they did in the past — they saw themselves as having the authority to decide who participates, how they should participate and what decisions were open to participation in meetings. Tom explained that “if I see that there is not really a good representation in the candidates coming through, I would phone a particular parent and say, I know you, and don’t you want to make yourself available because I think you can add something to the governing body...? And I would phone the other parent and say, listen, I have spoken to that parent, so, you will have to nominate him”. This practice indicates that almost all the key decisions relating to the participation of stakeholders in school governance are still subject to strong personal control and influence by principals. In other words, according to Sello, *nothing has changed: in most cases the principal is influencing the way things have to be done*.

One of the functions of school governing bodies, as stipulated by SASA (Act 84 of 1996), is to determine school-based policies, including policies on religion in education. By implication, the relevant stakeholders must constructively interact with one another in structures such as the SGB and at parents’ meetings. In terms of Section 16A (3) of the Education Laws Amendment Act 31(ELAA) of 2007, the principal’s role in this regard is to assist the governing body in the performance of its functions and responsibilities. He also has to do everything to ensure that the conduct of the school governing body and provincial education departments is lawful, fair and reasonable (Joubert & Prinsloo, 2007). With regard to the development and implementation of religion-in-education policy this means that the principal must see to it that the religion policy is discussed at parents’ meetings before it is adopted.

In spite of the SASA mandate, principals in this study have neither involved parents in meetings regarding religion policy discussions nor advised the SGB to do so. Connie was adamant that parents are never involved in the drafting of religion policy. “I am at the school for more than 20 years, but I have never seen the SGB calling parents for religion policy discussion. Nothing in relation to religion is ever mentioned to parents. Even in the application form, there is no area that requires religious status of the child. It is never

discussed”. At Neo’s school, too, they (i.e. the SMT) formulated the proposal and took it to the SGB for approval. The SGB reviewed the proposal and they were happy about it. “But, we did not discuss religion policy with the SGB”. These examples reaffirm perceptions that principals still dominate the development of policies and that the SGB, in most cases, rubber-stamps decisions made by the management component of the school.

Another reason why principals try to avoid conflict could be that they are afraid that the parent body, comprising followers of many different religions, might challenge their decisions, especially if the members of this body knew that their religious rights are protected by the Constitution. That this might be the case is suggested in Neo’s description of his school’s interactions with parents on religious matters.

We do not want to be specific because if you can say that the school subscribes to Christianity, we are afraid that some people may challenge that clause. So we tried to make it broad, we did not say, in this school... because once we became specific and say that it is a Christian school, we would invite trouble on the side of parents. Also if it opens doors for all religions, then we would provoke trouble. So we tried to be neutral so that even if the parent comes and claims to belong to a certain religion, we would be able to point at the same clause from the Constitution. We try as much as we can not to say our school subscribes to Christianity. But, the practice is still Christian practice and we have not experienced challenges in that regard.

In some of the other schools the “majority rules” principle was adopted to avoid the possibility of conflict arising during discussions on the development of religion-in-education policies for their schools. Which “majority” was considered differed from school to school, though. In Mpho’s school it is the religious orientation of the majority of *parents* that determine which religion is prioritised. “Because the majority of our parents are Christians, the school ultimately decided... in principle that we are going to be subscribing to Christianity as the religion in the school. So, because the majority agreed upon that; the rest had no choice but to follow”. In Nikiwe’s school it is the religion of the majority of *learners*. “Because ... 90 per cent of the learners were Christians - non-Christians were few - we followed the principle of the majority. Then everybody had to attend assembly even though some did not really believe in going there. But, the fewer ... they had to follow what the majority of the school was doing”. At Mark’s school, it was the religion of the majority in the school’s catchment area which determines which religion “the SGB of the school... choose[s][as] the religion of the school, [i.e. their decision is] based on the majority of learners within the vicinity of the school”.

These examples clearly indicate that principals apply the majority principle to avoid conflict in spite of the implications. In so doing, they are interpreting the law on behalf of and at the expense of other stakeholder groupings' needs in order to suit their own interests. The practice does not only make the conflict destructive, but it also increases or sharpens differences that lead to irresponsible and harmful behaviour.

Although the principals whose narratives are included in my study thought that they supported or assisted the SGBs of their schools with policy development their primary purpose, so it would seem, was to ensure that school-based policy documents complied with the requirements of the Department of Education. John, for example, told me that:

Departments do not come to our schools. They just take religion policy of the school, go and ratify it. Whether they ratify or sign it off for us to implement, is another case. But, we would get the policy back from the department stating that it has been ratified. So we just assume again that this policy has been read, tested against pieces of relevant legislation, maybe the Constitution, checked against it and sent back to school to say, 'Go and implement this'.

Neo agreed. At his school the SMT developed the policy and specified that there is freedom of religion within the school **but in practice**, “we would encourage learners strategically to attend ... assembly, where the prayer was said, hymns were sung and Scriptures were read. We were not telling them that we are Christians but the way things were done said it all”. A similar strategy was followed at Nikiwe's school. She admitted that, when confronted by educators who felt that other religions must be accommodated in the school's religion policy, they would then open the clause that says, everyone has the right to believe in his own religion. The policy would be written like that, but when it comes to practice, “I see all learners going to the assembly, singing, praying, and reading the Bible”. In Siphos words, “Religion policy changed on paper. Apart from the fact that people knew that it was voluntary, it was business as usual.”

Notwithstanding indications in the principals' narratives that they had attended training workshops on the implementation of the new religion-in-education policy this did not seem to have had any effect on the way they implemented or avoided the implementation of the new religion-in-education policy. One reason why these training sessions seemed to have little if any impact on the implementation process, according to Neo, is the emphasis that was placed on principles, specifically on *everyone's... right to freedom of religion*, rather than on implementation strategies. Instead of empowering principals and LO educators who attended

by telling them more about other religions and / or indicating how they could go about implementing the policy, the workshops increased their feelings of inadequacy. Tom, a Christian principal, admitted that he had doubts as to how to implement this policy and deal with demands of various religions and the training that they got did not inform them (or the LO educators) more about other religions. Nikiwe on the other hand, indicated to have received no training at all. She said, “Policies just come and there are no people to unpack them. Those that try to do so, interpret them to suit their interests”. John, looking at the training from a governance perspective, highlighted the need for SGB training, something that did not feature in any of the departmental workshops.

The SGB needs to be trained on how to draw the religion policy. Their function is to formulate or adopt religion policy of the school in terms of legislations of the country. As the principal, I know the stuff, not everything but, I can refer here and there for some issues. Only to find that parent members did not want to go with what the national policy dictates in terms of religion. They wanted to go with what they felt is right and appropriate to them. They bring in that particular old fashioned religious type of belief, traditional religion; they are still stuck in that. And changing their mind-set becomes very difficult.

What is of special concern to me in regard to my own investigation is that, although the principals who participated in this study were studying education management, leadership and policy at a post-graduate level, and that their studies included information on conflict management, this did not seem to have had any effect on the way they approached the implementation of the new religion-in-education policy. As indicated in the preceding paragraphs they did not mediate policy implementation; instead, they chose not to implement the policy or sub-contact into it either because they did not agree with it or because they were trying to avoid conflict.

Some principals, perhaps in an attempt to avoid conflict, opted not to disclose religious orientation of their schools. Even if there was a policy, according to Paul, no one would bring it up in the open and say that the school was interested in children of a particular religion because the school would finally not get children. Neo openly admits that in his school they never discuss the issue of religion with parents. In all “our meetings, we never thought of involving them in religious discussions”. The same happens in Mpho’s school, where they do not really talk about religious matters during admission, whether the school is subscribing to this kind of religion or what. “We do not tell parents about that. To be honest with you that does not happen even to date. We just admit the child, unless there are cases where a parent would tell you that his child must be excused from the assembly”.

Nikiwe recalled an incident when he had to resolve a conflict with a Life Orientation educator who tried to boycott the teaching of religion education, contending that his African Tradition did not allow him to teach about Christianity. Nikiwe told him that the curriculum instructed him to teach about Christian ethos not traditional orientations. He should do it for the sake of the learners. Even though he was not a Christian, he was bound by the curriculum to give learners Christian ethos. According to Paul, if the principal and school management see that parents that are not happy with the school's approach to religion matters are actually very few, they just let them go find another school. Also, when looking at the lost time that could hardly be covered due to attendance of the Mosque on Muslims' side, no parent would insist in this regard. Such practices weaken the voices of victims and strengthen those of perpetrators. For these reasons, parents and educators had no option but to comply with what they were offered as religious ethos of the school or else they would be victimised one way or another.

It was not, however, only school principals, according to their narratives, who tried to avoid conflict: some Life Orientation educators, who had to teach Religion Studies as part of their learning area, did too. The principals' narratives indicated that these educators did not give Religion Education the attention it required. One reason for this was that of their ignorance of other religions: all they knew was Christianity. Neo describes how teachers like these dealt with this matter, to them, unfamiliar subject.

In most cases educators are knowledgeable about Christian matters but not that of other religions. Yes, they would just indicate to learners that we have got different religions and give them their names. But, going into details about them would pose a challenge. They would therefore dwell much on Christianity to cover that period. And eh, not to say may be they want to promote Christianity, it is because most of them are Christians and they have knowledge only about Christianity.

This was also Paul's experience. There are educators who would teach about religion education because they had to. They would do the minimum because they wouldn't want to get into a situation where it would be controversy, where they would have to answer questions that they would not be sure of their answers. Yah, they were scared of getting to trouble.

Even if these educators wanted to, they were handicapped by the lack of teaching-learning materials to effectively teach the subject, according to Mpho. "Honestly, there are no materials to support the teachings except that you will have content in the text book". This,

Mpho claimed was not enough. “Yes, we do have text books, Life Orientation text books and as you know the text book is a very small document. They may just mention different kinds of religion, nothing much”. In addition to this, Mpho suggested, most of the Life Orientation educators are Christians. So, they tend to be biased against religions other than Christianity as they teach. It was something difficult to manage because really they believed that Christian principles were the best principles to be taught and to subscribe to.

Often, as in Mark’s school, bias was subtle and perhaps unintended, as illustrated in an extract from his narrative below.

*We set out the first week of the third term what we call **live for Christ** week where the first hours of every day pastors are called to come and share their stories, sing and worship with all students. In the evening they would have a **band** and worship and this happens for the whole week and we believe that there the students bond really closely. I would call it one of the backbones of Christian life, sharing, supporting and involvement of students in their lives and family lives and that I should believe is necessary.*

In Tom’s school, though, the wife of the SGB chairperson was a Muslim while the chairperson himself was a Hindu, Tom claimed, there were seldom any problems in his school as regards the religion-in-education policy. Even so the only religion openly practised was Christianity.

My previous chairman of the governing body was a Hindu and his wife was a Muslim. He was very happy with the way we dealt with religious matters at school. At the ceremony we would be signing Christian hymns, chorus, Bible reading and prayer. He did not have a problem with that. All he would ask was recognition that was there. He did not insist on anything. The fact that we were sensitive towards different religions, I think that was for him the most important aspect.”

The most tolerant school of all seemed to be John’s, where, “... if the parent comes and explains to us in a form of a letter from Mosque that the learner is actually attending Mosque on a Friday, then we would include that particular religion in the school’s policy. Up until such prove comes; we will practice Christianity, no matter what”.

It is clear from the preceding extracts that, notwithstanding their lack of training, their seeming inability to practically apply theoretical knowledge, their feelings of inadequacy and their commitment to their own faith, participating principals’ narratives indicate that they tried their best to accommodate learners from other religious groupings in their school. Based on their own understanding and interpretation of the relevant Acts (the Constitution and

SASA) and the national religion-in-education policy, they allocated a classroom for learners of other religions to observe their religions, allowed Muslim learners to go to the mosque on Fridays, admitted learners and appointed educators with religious orientations other than Christianity. They also worked harmoniously with SGB members from other religions, thereby demonstrating their tolerance of diversity. What they did not do is to change the religious ethos of their schools. Attendance of assemblies and other occasions where only Christian devotions were observed, were still compulsory, as Neo admitted. “We would emphasise the point of assembly attendance” and, in Mpho’s words, unless there are cases where a parent would tell that his child must be excused from the assembly, all learners had to attend.

Talking about their capacity as principals, Mpho and John admitted having difficulty imagining themselves teaching religions different from theirs. Mpho, himself a Life Orientation educator, admitted that in every religion there is something good. “But it is not inculcated in me as a Christian to start teaching about Muslim principles which I do not know”, he added. John, on the other hand, did not consider the possibility that there was anything ‘good’ in other religions, hence his reluctance to teach them to children.

There is nowhere else, I cannot think of anything else apart from Christian religious observances that could teach these learners about morality. You know, there is no way; there is no textbook that can teach you morality. So, at our school we practice Christianity, no matter what. I have never read the Koran, trying to teach about [it] could be challenging to me. I may want to use a certain verse from it only to find out that it is not in line with the Bible, I would not even think of saying that for the fear of making my God angry because in so doing, I would be uplifting other gods on the other side.

It might be attitudes like these that lie at the heart of persistent intolerance against other religions at the schools where these principals were based. In Neo’s school, for example, “if learners would come wearing same hats as those worn by Muslims, we would call and tell them to stop wearing such hats with the aim of trying to discourage them from influencing others”. In Sello’s school “...there was this Muslim committee member who also persuaded to be given a slot on the argument that there are also Muslim children in our school. We once gave him an opportunity but it was not appreciated. You could just see from their response that they do not enjoy it as they do with Christianity. We then had to discontinue”.

Paul's experience of religious intolerance was somewhat different in that it happened not at the school where he was a principal but at the school his daughter attended.

“My daughter was at one of the Christian-faith based schools. During the fasting month, it was insisted that she goes and performs some duties including the selling of food and pork for that matter. The school would insist because it was part of the policy. While still in that school, the management used to call compulsory parents' meetings during Islamic days. When tried to explain it to them, they just ignored it.”

Moreover, according to Paul, who has in his life been a Hindu, Christian and Muslim, when the Muslim children wanted to wear a beard, the school found that a problem. They were also not allowed to wear their hat, the hat they wear to a Mosque. Even when they wanted to wear their robes that also created a problem. So, there was a bit of uneasiness with the children attending. At some stage, “I had to go to Mosque and for me to leave early became a problem”, he emphasised.

Indications from principals' narratives on the whole are that the special demands, or privileges, claimed by Muslim children are seen as potentially undermining school discipline and / or complicating school management. John mentioned, for example, that Muslim boys leaving school early on Fridays to attend mosque was actually a problem in terms of learning and teaching because there was no cover up time in terms of the activities that took place during their absence. Perhaps this is why, in Tom's school, although it is permitted, very few of them asked to be excused on Fridays for mosque.

As indicated earlier, one of the strategies participating principals used to accommodate learners from other faiths and which they regard as an indication of their tolerance for other religions, is the allocation of a class where those learners can perform their religious rituals while other children are at assembly. For learners and excusing educators from attending or conducting assemblies were indications that they were tolerant to their religions. Mpho remembered, for example, that during the previous year a Muslim learner who used to wear a head scarf did not want to attend the assembly.

Indicating the school's adherence to its religion policy, which allows freedom of religion, the learner was given the use of a classroom where he could observe his own religion. In Mark's school, it is customary on Mondays when [they] have the assembly, [they] have a classroom allocated for example, Seventh Day Adventists as they seem to be in large numbers whereas in Tom's school, educators are told when they are appointed at the school that they are

welcome to arrive at school five minutes later if they are uncomfortable with the way morning assemblies are dealt with. In Neo's school, if an educator is not comfortable with the conducting of the assembly, we asked them to report and though the name will remain on the roster, one SMT member will stand in for him when it's his turn.

Principals also seem to regard the discussions they held with parents and educators on the Christian ethos of their schools — mostly during orientation or interviews in the case of educator appointment — as evidence of their religious tolerance. This is illustrated in an extract from Mark's narrative.

At the initial interview for the entrance or admissions at the school, we would tell the parents that this is the Christian school where Christian faith is practiced so that at least they are aware though that does not discontinue the admission of children. We have open discussion explaining to the newly appointed candidates that our school is Christian based and this is how we deal with religious matters. We would then like to find the religious side of the candidate and the characteristics of his religion as well as how best he thinks he would be part and parcel of the school community.

In Tom's case, on the other hand, they had a meeting with all the parents of Muslim children to discuss how they would feel about their children attending assembly where there is of course Christian devotion taking place.

These principals were convinced that it was because of the way in which they dealt with the new religion in education requirements that there was no conflict in this regard. In fact, they believed that all the parents were satisfied with the policies of their schools as they were. According to Tom, "all the parents assured us that they had no problem with their children attending Christian devotions because they feel that the values that we bring to the Christian devotions or the values that are emphasised during those devotions are exactly the same as those that they have in Muslim religion. If we teach respect, they teach that as well". Tefo put it even more strongly when he claimed that "parents were very much supportive. They would say, eh, 'I schooled in 1936, I was taught religious education. I am what I am today because of what I was taught in those lessons. So, I want the same information to be passed on to my children'".

The only principal who indicated that things might not be as calm as they seem on the surface was Paul. According to him, the fact that parents do not complain is not necessarily an indication that they are satisfied with what is going on. Although the majority of parents, mostly black, never complain when it comes to religion, a few, Indian, the Muslim parents complained, not even all of them as well. Most of them simply keep quiet to maintain the peace.

Indications from their narratives also suggest that the majority of the participating principals assume that learners in their schools are perfectly happy with the *status quo* of Christian religious instruction because they “never ask to be excused from assembly, not in our school. I think it was because of its character where children were still very respectful of the authority. Maybe they thought they would be going beyond” Sello said. This is not, however, the case in John’s and Neo’s schools, where some of the learners started saying “I am Muslim” and they would wear their hats, request permission to go to Mosque at 12:00 on a Friday or even come late to school. Some of them would report that at the assembly they are asked to sing Christian songs and that is against their religion.

The greatest challenges principals seem to have encountered in their attempts to accommodate other religions without compromising their own were with educators. A number of the participating principals indicated that they were challenged by teachers who did not want to conduct the assembly and hid themselves behind the policy, saying, “I am not a Christian, so, I cannot conduct the assembly”. In response to such a challenge, some principals accepted as an indication of respect of educators’ rights to freedom of choice. “...you cannot force someone to do what is against his / her religion, mm, more so when the Constitution protects their rights” Tefo stressed the point. However, he added that there were those educators who continued offering Christian religious observances to learners. “There are those educators who call themselves the ‘Born again’ who continued engaging learners in the performance of religious devotions at the assembly” Tefo added. Nikiwe addressed her educators’ concern differently. She would allocate a different task to such educators while the whole school is busy at the assembly. But, according to her perception, the being not a Christian was not a genuine reason for her educators, the fact of the matter is that they were lazy to contact the assembly. She narrated her experience:

Some educators would come up and say, ‘No, no, no, I do not want to go to assembly because I do not believe in Christianity and as the principal, I would respect that and allocate the other duty which was of ‘gate

control', one way or the other, we have to share the load. I realised that some teachers were just lazy to run the assembly. That did not mean that they were real believers of other religions. But because they were given a task to perform, everyone changed the mind and joined the duty roster of running the assembly because they were really Christians.

Whether or not principals, educators, parents or learners ever shared their concerns with anybody was not the focus of this study. It is a matter of concern, though, that the Department of Education had not picked up on these and / or made any attempt to mediate emerging or underlying conflicts in this regard. Instead, so it seems from principals' narratives, the department shuts its eyes to contraventions of the policy. Such contraventions, according to Paul, are most prevalent in the ex-Model C schools; they did not have tolerance on other religions. But, because they are powerful schools, they get good results, department officials scare to give them a hard time about it. Also, according to Gertrude, most of the workshops and seminars conducted by departmental officials seemed to suggest that the *status quo* be maintained in that they are still opened in only one religious way whereas there were people that belonged to different religions in such meetings.

Most of the principals in this study held their own workshops on issues such as the lack of training, material resources and many others but their narratives revealed few instances where educators and some principals went the extra mile to expand their knowledge and that of educators to the best interests of learners. That was an exception to the rule. Realising that his educators' limited knowledge posed a challenge to their teaching of religions of the world, he established a partnership with a certain publisher to provide the school with support material. These would include text books, charts and many more on different religions included in the curriculum prescribed by the Gauteng Department of Education. He explained that "in terms of religion education, we explain and teach them about religions in terms of what each religion stands for, and what each religion is based on. We use Kids Development Academy (KDA) books, programmes developed by KDA, CDs DVDs and text books."

Also, because of the culturally diverse composition of his school, Tom did not balk at inviting different religious leaders to his school to give the insights of their religions to learners and other educators.

I can recall a day when they brought in a Jewish Rabbi, a Christian Minister, a leader from Greek Orthodox Church; I think they were about six or seven of them. Each one of them explained to the children, 'Listen, this is what we do, this is what we wear, and this is what we believe in...' And it was normally quite a lot of fun because children could see all those religious leaders together, sharing the insights of their religions

with them. That portrayed to them the message that ‘if all these religious leaders from different religions and denominations can sit on the same platform, speak to us and be friendly with each other and drink tea or whatever together, and they are people and normal people like us, why can’t we do the same?’ We have done that a number of times.

In his capacity as the principal, Tom also took the initiative to invite a 73rd generation descendant of Confucianism to his school. He said,

But, because I have got a number of Chinese children, South African Chinese and foreign Chinese children, in our school and because we also have a lot of Korean children and others, I thought it would be good to invite Mr Kong to our school. He actually spent the whole morning with us in our school explaining the values of Confucianism, where it comes from as well as its History and the role it plays in a Chinese society. China being the second country with largest economy in the world today, China being still developing country and the role it plays in the world economy as well as in politics, I thought it would be good to have him.

To illustrate his ‘openness’ and ‘tolerance’ Tom related an incident where he opposed the pregnancy policy of the school which stipulated that pregnant girls are to be removed from the school. When a Grade 11 learner at the school fell pregnant Tom was faced with a moral dilemma.

My Christian faith does not agree with that in terms of sex before marriage and the alike. But again, going back to what I said in the beginning, Jesus taught us ‘not to judge’. My job as the principal was ‘How I could help the learner have her right to education protected while taking care of the unborn baby at the same time.’ If I could not help the learner, I could have affected the unborn baby. The girl fell pregnant in 2010 and had her baby beginning March 2011, meaning that she did not attend school the whole of the first term. She came back after her 4 months maternity leave and the teachers gave her all the outstanding work and she passed her Metric with 73 per cent average”

Whereas Tom took the responsibility to provide educators in his school with resources and training on himself as principal, Gertrude ‘trained’ herself. She forgot about *I, me* and *me*, focusing on her commitment to do her best. In doing so she portrayed a spirit of selflessness, serving the Christian community regardless of her own religion. Unlike most of the educators and principals described in this study, it was not Gertrude’s intention to convert to Christianity or to indoctrinate the learners with principles from her religion. She gained parents’ trust because she was unbiased and had a sense of self-efficacy. “I knew my abilities, I think I knew I was a good teacher, I knew I believed in my teaching and I could teach anything, even ... another religion”.

Gertrude's lack of bias is reflected in the way she conducts assemblies and in the freedom that she give learners in her school to practise their own religions.

No one is allowed to basically mention any specific god at the assembly. If we make a prayer we just refer to god as god nothing else. But, the wonderful thing with our school is, in the morning the Jewish children have their prayer, Christian children pray at break time, Muslim children pray after school, then Hindus, we are about to start. So, it is more liberal because we respect everyone's religion.

To promote knowledge of and tolerance towards other religions amongst teachers and learners in her school, important religious events for different religions are given special attention by the whole school.

We have assemblies where we celebrate important occasions. Divali will come up and I speak to the children and expose them. During Jewish festivals, the Jewish teacher will come up, talk about it and we celebrate it after, so on and so forth and that is how our children are being exposed to all these different religions. And that is what makes us totally different. That's why we would say, we have 67 nationalities, we recognise them and we allow them to wear their outfit and whenever there is an important occasion to celebrate we allow them to do that. We do not feel threatened in any way.

In terms of religion education in Life Orientation, her arrangements are that:

At age 6 to 10, religion education is a little bit more formal. We have it in a form of moral education in Christian period, in the same period the Hindu learners will have their own worship and Muslims as well and there is a Christian based period where they then go for Bible education, there it is formalised. Whereas for older learners, we teach it more at the assemblies, there isn't a subject more specifically for it because we have all these other options. But, the religion part of that Life Orientation, is not taught as lessons, it is more on functions, celebrations like that.

Looking back on her own experiences of religion at school, Gertrude realises that the religious situation at her current school is very different from the one she experienced as a child and as a young educators, something that to her is a positive rather than a negative experience.

That's what is very different with the way we were brought up and schools that we went to, where we would generally stay with people that are common to us with similar background, but, not in our school. I mean you will find a very inter-religious community and the good thing is that you will see them inviting each other over for different religious occasions. I mean, they will call each other for Ramadan or for Hindu festival.

Paul's religious history also seems to have had an effect on the way teachers in his school approach other religions. Although Christianity is still dominant, educators those were really interested in teaching about different religions got children's input to religion, to assist in the teaching and learning regarding their cultural activities.

5.6 Conclusion

In this chapter, I presented principals' stories on their experiences with different religion policies during their childhood age, and as young educators. I also explored how those experiences may have shaped the way in which they currently deal with the development and implementation of religion policies in their schools. A brief summary of the impact of these experiences is given below.

5.6.1 Religious education as a life compass

From the principals' point of view, all religions instil moral values in their followers. However, since most of the participating principals were Christians they believed that it was their Christian religious education which made the greatest contribution to forming them into who they were at the time of the research. They regarded their schools days as a frame of reference or baseline in terms of guiding current and future generations to come, ascribing learner and educator ill-discipline today to the absence of Christian religious education in the school curriculum. According to them, religious education was the source of moral values such as respect, discipline; norms such as love, respect, and care for one another. They therefore felt the need for learners of today to have religious – mostly Christian - education as part of the school curriculum. It is therefore not surprising that the majority of the participating principals preferred to ignore the policy and regarded only Christianity to be the way of life. Their schools and meetings opened and closed with a prayer. All learners and staff are expected to attend such devotions regardless their religious orientations.

5.6.2 Schools and communities in religious partnership

Parent communities and a principal have a common mission, that of transferring the religious values they learnt in childhood to their children. This may be why ministers, pastors or religious leaders used to be invited in schools to come and offer some sermons and school facilities were sometimes used for religious observances.

At the time of the interviews, most of the principals who participated in this study still invited only Christian religious leaders in their schools. There were only two exceptions to this rule, suggesting that very little if anything has in fact changed in this regard.

5.6.3 Intolerance to other religions

Religions other than Christianity were not tolerated in these principals' childhood days or at the time when they were young educators. As a result, whatever was deemed necessary could be done to ensure that other religions are not acknowledged or promoted on school premises. Included in steps to inhibit the existence of other religions were solely Christian morning devotions, short Christian prayer meetings, Biblical or religious studies as subjects, Christian Student Movements, and so forth. Activities like these ensured that not only those who subscribed to the Christian faith but also those who did not were filled with Christian dogma.

The childhood message that was clearly communicated to principals participating in this study was therefore that no religion other than Christianity is a true religion. It is therefore not surprising that school principals in this study still feel that teaching about religions other than their own would be promoting such religions and degrading their own "God". Consequently, even in schools where religion education is offered, if offered, the religion of the majority dominates, hence religious inequalities, social injustices and unfair discrimination are still at the order of the day.

However, changes in religious attitudes, albeit minimal, are indicated in the findings of this study. Two of the principals demonstrated commitment to religion in education reform. Even though they appeared to be dominant in several occasions where decisions were made (SGB election, parents' involvement), which could probably result from lack of training, they demonstrated greater openness to other religions which enabled them to approach implementation of the policy in a more accommodating way. Each religion represented in one of these two principals' schools has a slot in the school program for it to show-case its orientations and important days are celebrated together at the assembly. Moreover, one of these principals did not hesitate to register with one of publishers for provision of text books, CDs and DVDs to cater for the teaching about religions other than Christianity.

5.6.4 *Hardships experienced by religious minorities*

The second faith group was that of Hindus. Although at the time of the study there was one principal from this religion, they demonstrated some hardships. Like the Christian principals, they enjoyed their childhood, when they would associate with people from the same background. When they got to higher education levels they were exposed to people from other religions, Christians in particular. Due to their smaller numbers as compared to Christians, they could feel isolated. Although they felt the need to associate with people from other religions, they had that fear of being rejected. However, their openness and tolerance to other religions enabled them to easily adapt and overcome tensions and dilemmas associated with being a religious minority.

The majority of the principals who participated in the study give Christianity the first preference and religions in the minority were marginalised. In those days, morning devotions where prayers were said, hymns were sung and scriptures were read, were compulsory for all learners and staff regardless of religion. Learners and educators from other religions were not allowed to observe their religions could it be by dress code or worship where they could be seen and in such cases, principals sub-contracted into the policy and provided classrooms.

5.6.5 *Principals as key agents in implementing religion-in-education policy*

According to Section 15(1) of the South African Constitution (Act 108 of 1996) “[e]veryone has the right to freedom of conscience, religion, thought, belief and opinion.” Section 15(2) points out that religious observance may be conducted at state or state-aided institutions, provided that (a) those observances follow rules made by the appropriate public authorities; (b) they are conducted in an equitable manner; and (c) the attendance at them is free and voluntary (RSA, 1996). In terms of the school situation, this section implies that religious observances may be conducted at a public school under rules issued by the governing body if such observances are conducted on an equitable basis and attendance at them by learners and members of staff if free and voluntary. This provision is further strengthened in paragraph 58 of the National Policy on Religion and Education which states that the governing bodies of public schools may make their facilities available for religious observances but also on equitable basis. The policy moreover, gives the SGB powers to determine the nature and content of religious observances for educators and learners.

Bearing in mind that the school principal remains the key change agent in any planned school innovation, also in the transformation of national religion policy implementation, he is supposed to ensure that the policy of the school is implemented as developed and adopted by the SGB, of which he is a member.

Indications from my study are that participating principals *sub-contracted* into the policy by becoming the *appropriate authorities* that crafted the religion policy of the schools. In so doing some of them owned the task fully while others involved the senior management team (SMT). Those that involved the SGB would agree with decisions taken but would either practise the opposite or manipulate SGB elections with the intention to have people from the same faith in majority. It is in terms of such practices that, in *accordance with the Constitution, section 22 (1) of the Schools Act (84 of 1996)*, the participating principals adapted some clauses into their school policies and the SGB acted as a “rubber stamp” without any guarantee that such clauses would in fact be implemented. The majority of principals who participated in the study also believed that permitting, for instance Muslim learners to go to mosque without considering their lost time or sparing them a classroom was in a way, *conducting religious observances on an equitable basis as well availing their facilities for such observances*.

5.6.6 Lack of training

The other contributing factor that influenced ways in which participating principals chose to implement religion-in-education policy was lack of training. Some principals who participated in the study *ignored* the policy, not only by undermining the involvement of the SGB in the religion policy crafting, but also by not bringing the crafted religion policy to parents for discussion. This may be because on one hand, a great number of school governors who seemed to be parents were not skilled and knowledgeable enough for the task or that. As principals on the other, they were not trained on how to adopt a more democratic and participatory style of management as SASA requires. In doing so, principals increased the perpetuation of religious illiteracy.

Research suggests that lack of knowledge about other people’s customs, beliefs, and rituals result in suspicion and intolerance within school communities (Lubbe, 1998; Kilian, 1993). Often, respect comes from understanding and knowledge, and fear comes from ignorance (Amin *et al*, 1998). Owing to the fact that people who have the necessary knowledge of

religions other than Christianity are not favoured in decision making there is a high rate of religious illiteracy amongst principals and educators in schools. Neither principals nor educators received training that equipped them with knowledge, skills and attitudes necessary for either policy implementation or religion education in schools.

5.6.7 Principals' reference to the past

It is empirically suggested that South Africans are not quite satisfied with the manner in which the State has dealt with the issue of religious diversity in public education (Van der Walt, 2011; Chisholm, 2005). According to the participating principals, religion-in-education policy was appropriate for those schools with multi-faith population but not for single-faith schools like theirs. For these reasons, they referred more to their past religious experiences than to their current experiences with the implementation of the new religion policy in schools. This could be due to a lack of training on policy implementation or to what they viewed and experienced as important in their personal and professional lives. It was therefore apparent that regardless of the laws and policies laid down for them to abide by, they tried whatever they could to ignore the new religion policy.

5.6.8 Conflict avoidance

Tensions and dilemmas are inevitable when one or the other party feels marginalised. It is clear from this study that educators, parents and learners showed their dissatisfaction with the ways in which principals handled the whole process differently. Grievances were raised by parents, learners or educators, and assemblies and religion education lessons were boycotted, either by learners or educators. This affirmed what Xaba (2011) found, namely that most principals tend to avoid conflict by *sub-contracting* into the policy to a limited extent to comply with the legislation instructions.

Because of the lack of knowledge, skills, values and attitudes, principals use whatever means they can to avoid existing religious conflicts in their schools. Some would adapt a certain clause to the school policy for it to appear in line with what the department requires and implement a different version while others would opt for the principle of religion in the majority within the vicinity of the school at the initial stage — crafting of the policy. In so doing, they run the risk that conflict could drag on overtly or covertly. Because conflict has not been resolved it could become a destructive force (Cunningham, 1998).

Emotions such as feeling relatively *weak* and incapacitated; a sense of lost control over the situation, accompanied by confusion, doubt, anger, uncertainty are inevitable. Such feelings are likely to take conflict to a level *self-absorption*, with each disputant becoming more focused on the self only — more protective of self and more suspicious, hostile, closed, and impervious to the perspective of the other person. As Bush and Folger (2005) put it, “No matter how strong people are; conflict propels them into relative weakness. No matter how considerate of others people are conflict propels them into self-absorption and self-centeredness”. More importantly, the experiences of weakness and self-absorption do not occur independently; rather, they reinforce each other in a feedback loop: *...the weaker I become, the more hostile and closed I am toward you; and the more hostile I am toward you, the more you react to me in kind, the weaker I feel, the more hostile and closed I become, and so on*— the latter becomes a *vicious circle* (Bush & Folger, 2005).

5.6.9 Material resources

Absence of relevant material resources was cited as one of the reasons why religion education was not offered in accordance with policy in some schools. Some principals believed that teaching and learning about other religions would degrade their “God”. So they preferred to avoid the policy, not even taking the initiative to see whether or not other religions are considered in such lessons. Learners’ text books, which educators rely on for the teaching of the subject area, are of limited use since they provide very little information on different religions. As a result, educators opt for the “known”, in this case, Christianity, thereby perpetuating its dominance over other religions. Nevertheless, in realising the need for learners to be taught about other religions, one of the participating principals took an initiative in registering with one of publishers for provision of text books, CDs and DVDs to cater for such teaching and learning about religions other than Christianity.

5.7 Conclusion

After an extensive analysis of principals’ descriptions, there was no indication of discussions on mediation. The implication is that principals in this study did not use mediation as leadership strategy to deal with conflict in schools. This could result from the fact that mediation as a new discourse that is frequently used elsewhere but underdeveloped in other fields. It has not received the necessary attention within the education field. It is highly possible that principals in this study would not recognise it as a possible strategy because (1) they have not received training or skilled in its use, and (2) mediation requires a particular set of knowledge, skills and attitude which seem to be absent in most of the narratives.

Looking at the commitment participating principals have to religious education and to their belief that all religions have something in common — the promotion of moral values — I have no doubt that they can use the same view, experience and potential to influence their schools to implement religion-in-education policy should they attain proper training and wish to do so. This substantiates the point that it is not only material resources (text books) that fuel the value of commitment and religious tolerance: confident attitudes, skills and knowledge play a crucial role as well.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Introduction

As indicated in Chapter 1, the aim of the study was to explore how school principals describe and experience their mediating role in the implementation of the National Policy on Religion and Education within an existing religion policy context in South African schools. The key question that drove the study was, **“How do school principals deal with the implementation of the National Policy on Religion and Education in schools?”** Questions that were of great assistance in answering this research question follows later in this chapter. Informed by the purpose of this chapter, I provide a succinct analysis of the insights I gained from my review of literature pertaining to the research question above. I then present the findings from empirical research I conducted to find answers to the research questions and present my conclusions on the nature of and reasons for the ways in which participating principals experienced their mediation role in the implementation of the policy concerned. Finally I offer some recommendations for further research in this area.

6.2 The religion in education context

The post-1994 government, recognising not only the existence of deep-rooted historical inequalities in South African education in general and in religion in particular, but also the diverse nature of the South African population in terms of culture, language and religion, found it necessary to address past inequalities while simultaneously developing a unity of purpose and spirit that cherishes and celebrates diversity. This initiative is well expressed in Section 15(1) of the Constitution (No: 108 of 1996), which states that “[e]veryone has the right to freedom of conscience, religion, thought, belief and opinion”. Section 15 (2), in particular, points out that religious observances may be conducted at State or State-aided institutions, provided that (a) those observances follow rules made by the appropriate public authorities, (b) they are conducted in an equitable manner, and (c) their attendance is free and voluntary (RSA, 1996). With regard to education, Section 7 of the South African Schools Act (Act 84 of 1996) clearly indicates that “subject to the Constitution and any applicable provincial law, religious observances may be conducted at a public school under rules issued by the governing body if such observances are conducted on an equitable basis and if attendance of such observance by learners and members of staff is free and voluntary. This provision is further emphasised in paragraph 58 of the National Policy on Religion and

Education which stipulates that the governing bodies of public schools may make their facilities available for religious observances provided that this is also done on equitable basis. The policy also gives the SGB the power to determine the nature and content of religious observances for educators and learners (DoE, 2003).

Looking at these two laws and the policy, one could infer that the primary aim of the government is to provide for democratic structures and a participatory process in which representatives of all the stakeholders (parents, educators, non-educators, learners in secondary schools, and even the State, as represented by the principal) are elected to school governing bodies (DoE, 1996). This said, one cannot escape from the reality that the way in which parents, educators and learners on the SGB understand and interpret participation, representation and decision making in school governance, together with the different meanings they attach to “religious rights and freedoms” is fraught with the possibility of conflict and other dilemmas in the area of religion policy implementation in schools. Initial announcements that religion education programmes in schools would be changed, for example, provoked a storm of controversy from many individuals and groups in the religious, educational and public spheres (Chidester, 2003, Roux, 2001). These long and highly charged debates delayed implementation of the National Policy on Religion and Education until 2003.

The eventual release of the national religion policy in 2003 did little to defuse these conflicts. The dissatisfaction of stakeholder groupings with the way in which government is dealing with religious matters in schools is evident from an increasing number of court and legislative conflicts between the government and parents over the policy (as discussed in Chapter 3). Key conflicts hinge on issues such as whether or not parents may exempt children from certain classes with objectionable content; whether citizens or the government may allocate tax monies to the support of private religious schools; to what extent parents may influence the content selection of religion education; whether prayer is permitted in schools or during school activities; to what extent religious student groups may exist, and many others (Donnelly, 2011). Given the management training that principals who participated in my study have undergone, and having taken cognizance of their position as leaders and managers within this context, I have argued, though, that they should have been able to mediate the outcome of the required changes.

6.3 Strategies for dealing with change management and conflict

In Chapter 2 I argued that different managers opt for different strategies in order to manage change and / or to resolve conflicts associated with change management processes. I indicated that some managers tend to resist or ignore change. Resistance to change usually hinders the process during either the conception or the development stage, having as aim the maintenance of the *status quo*. Inadequate information and training on the “what”, “why” and “how” of a new policy could, for instance, result in opposition and / or an unwillingness to adopt the new policy. From an education point of view, change agents may passively demonstrate their resistance to proposed education policy change by either delaying or ignoring it, claiming that schools lack the requisite information on policy reform. Active resistance, on the other hand, may include the banning of religious observances other than the dominant one on school premises and / or refusing permission for participation in religious observances by either learners or staff.

While some managers might resist or ignore proposed changes, others may choose to sub-contract into the change. Sub-contracting in this study refers to a phenomenon where the school principal implements the intended educational change according to the wishes of a particular interest group or the department of education. As indicated in previous chapters (see Chapter 2), the structural arrangement which positions the principal as the head of a school’s internal management as well as an ex-officio representative of the department of education makes him the key change agent and the custodian of resources in the implementation process. In terms of this structure, the school principal, as a sub-contractor, is simply one more link in a chain leading down from policy developers through provincial departments to school-based change agents, whose duty it is to realise the intended change. From a power perspective this could mean that the school principal might either translate the policy according to his own understanding or expect others to slavishly implement policy according to government prescripts.

It is highly likely that, instead of resolving conflict by avoiding it, managers like these might cause it to overtly or covertly drag on. A conflict that is not resolved could, moreover, become a destructive force. The needs pertaining to change are universal rather than mutually exclusive but no person’s or group’s needs can be satisfied at others’ expense. Thus, without distributive justice, a sense of control and prospects for the pursuit of all other societal developmental needs in every social system, instability and conflict is inevitable (Cunningham, 1998).

Unlike the two kinds of managers described above – i.e. those who passively or actively resist change, there is a group of managers who use mediation as a leadership strategy to resolve conflicts associated with the implementation of change. In this study mediation is described as a process in which conflict itself is transformed from a negative and destructive interaction to a positive and constructive one. From an education management perspective this implies that the principal negotiates with various interest groups to try and reconcile differences and to find a way in which implementation acknowledges the interests of various stakeholders. Two approaches to mediation are outlined in this study, namely problem-solving mediation and transformative mediation, both of which are discussed below.

Problem-solving mediation is premised on an “individualised ideology”, i.e. an ideology premised on the notion that a human being’s own needs and interests motivate him to interact with others, and even to establish interdependent relationships. Thus, when confronted with conflicts to be resolved, he focuses on finding solutions to problems that would maximise his own advantage / gains. By implication, a manager, as a human being, who feels weak or incapable, or who senses that he is losing control of the situation due to his change efforts being met by confusion, doubt, anger, uncertainty, and indecisiveness would try to control the situation to his own advantage. He could, for example, use deadlines to move disputants towards consensus as quickly as possible or he could discourage them from discussing the past, because it often involves blame, which hinders progress. He would therefore steer disputants towards a discussion of their future ‘wants’ and ways in which they could obtain these. In doing so he would be creating greater *self-absorption*: disputants would focus more and more on their own selves, becoming increasingly protective of their own views and more suspicious, hostile, closed, and impervious to the others’ perspectives and / or points of view. This, in turn, could result in further conflict.

Transformative mediation, on the other hand, is informed by “relational ideology”. In accordance with this ideology, individuals in conflict relations try to improve the quality of their relationships by seeking to better understand themselves and others in the creation of shared meanings. The role of the manager as a transformative mediator is therefore to foster opportunities for *empowerment* (growth in strength of self), and *recognition* (concern for others). In doing so, he enables disputants to move from being unsettled, confused, fearful, disorganised, or unsure about the proposed change to a state of greater calm, clarity and confidence. This, in turn, makes them more focused and /or decisive. They might, for

instance, begin to better understand which resources are available to them and / or which resources they need to make informed choices. In addition, disputants might also see and understand the other person's point of view — understanding how opponents define a problem and why they seek the solutions that they do. As mutual understanding grows, disputants may be able to reach a mutually satisfactory solution or may think of alternate ways of handling the situation. As a result, they might, with the mediator's help, recover their own sense of competence and connection, reverse the negative conflict cycle, re-establish constructive interaction, and move forward on a positive footing.

This study is premised on the notion that the kind of transformative mediation outlined above is the most appropriate leadership strategy for conflict resolution in existing religious contexts in South African schools.

6.4 Past religion policy experiences

A review of participating principals' past experiences of religion in schools, particularly prior to 1994, revealed the important role that religion played in schools as well as the influence – positive as well as negative – which this had on their own lives. On the positive side, they found religious teachings, regardless of religious affiliation, to have inculcated in them valuable life principles, like respecting and loving one another. These principles have, according to them, become the norm for acceptable social behaviour – avoiding murder, adultery and theft. It is for these reasons that they regard religion to be their lives' compass.

As custodians of religious and educational knowledge principals were highly respected and honoured, not only in the schools of which they were in charge but also in the communities where they lived. Because of this their right to make decisions on religious matters in schools, including decisions on morning devotions, were seldom if ever questioned, hence stakeholder groupings had no say in this regard. School days typically commenced with a prayer, hymn singing and scripture reading which were compulsory for all learners and staff, regardless of their religious beliefs. Moreover, only those parents who themselves were ministers, pastors or religious leaders were invited to offer sermons to learners and staff.

Even during their post-school training, according to participating principals, religion was fundamental to their training as educators. At this stage of their lives, Christian religious education became more communal in the sense that, as learners, they had to demonstrate understanding and commitment by transmitting acquired Christian values and norms to the

next generation through Sunday school teaching and by ensuring the continuation of the Christian way of life through participation in or establishment of Student Christian Movements. Principals also indicated that although corporal punishment, as justified in Christian teachings, resulted in fear of not performing to the required standard, it nonetheless helped them to live good moral lives.

As children, two of the participants attended Hindu-faith based schools where Hinduism was taught at assemblies and observed in festivals and celebrations. It was during the latter – festivals and celebrations – that they established relationships with people sharing the same background — Hindus or Muslims. Like Christian principals, it was through experiences like these that moral values such as respect, diligence, open-mindedness, tolerance and right living were inculcated in them.

On a different note, the government at that time emphasised that Christianity was the only true religion. Because of this, attendance of morning assemblies, where only Christian devotions were observed was compulsory in most public schools. Also, Biblical Studies, where only the Bible was studied, was a compulsory subject and was used to indoctrinate non-Christians. Indications of some tolerance of other religions on the side of the government were evident in the allowance of other religions were allowed in public schools for races other than whites. Because of this practice, most of the participating principals were not even aware of the existence of other religions while they were still studying, at school and in college. Only one of the principals learnt about the existence of other religions during his years of study, but only when he had the opportunity to further his teacher training in London, in a multi-religious institution. This was his first exposure to religions other than Christianity. Even though his narrative reveals that he found this to be an awesome experience – as they would celebrate and attend different religious festivals and events together – this did not pose a challenge to his own Christianity. His participation in activities like these did, however, teach him values such as team work, appreciation, and tolerance of others.

Participating principals who grew up in the Hindu faith first had to study alongside Christians when they embarked on higher education studies. The overwhelming majority of Christians who attended these institutions made them feel lonely, isolated, and marginalized, even though they would meet as Indians — Hindus and / or Muslims. Influenced by her experience as a pianist for Christian congregation in church when she was still a child, one of them

wanted to mix with Christian students but her fear of rejection overshadowed her desire and prevented her from trying to become part of their ‘gatherings’. Ironically this principal, having completed her teacher training, was appointed to a Christian faith based school in the Kwa-Zulu Natal province.

The other Hindu participant, the study indicated, seemingly converted to Christianity at one stage. It is important to note that although it seemed as if he converted because of his inherent open-mindedness to and tolerance of other religions, an analysis of his narrative in this study suggest that there were three main reasons for his conversion. The first was the poverty of his family in comparison with other Hindu families; the second was the healing powers he observed in Christian leaders, and the third was a growing disenchantment with his initial religious beliefs and values, which he described as “bad” since his family would be shunned due to their poverty. Unlike the majority of Christian principals participating in this study, he did not remain a devoted Christian who lived out the principles of Christianity. Indications are that perhaps he was never a devoted Hindu either. Rather, so it would seem, he regarded the rituals and celebrations as a means to an end, something that held certain benefits for an impoverished family and child. Indications are that this might also be one of the reasons why he converted to Christianity, not because of what Christians believed or valued, but for the external benefits that he and his family could derive – healing powers and status in the community.

6.5 Religion in education—post 1994

As young educators, principals in this study were aware of religious changes that came along with the Constitution after 1994. Some of the changes they mentioned were that, although morning assemblies remained the responsibility of the principal they were no longer compulsory but free and voluntary; that no learners may be refused admission to a school, and that no educator may be refused appointment on religious grounds. It is because of this clause that the two principals in my study who grew up in the Hindu faith were appointed to predominantly white, Christian-oriented schools regardless of the fact that they were non-whites.

Let me highlight that when he got to teacher training college, the male principal who was originally a Hindu, converted to Islam because he fell in love with and later married a Muslim girl. This strengthens the claim I made earlier that he never really understood the

fundamental principles underlying a religion. According to him, so it would seem, religion was always an externality — something from which he could personally gain rather than something to which he could commit. Joining a Christian-faith based schools and observing Christian devotions as a young educator has therefore never been a challenge for him.

As for the other Hindu participant, I indicated in earlier chapters that she was appointed as the first educator of colour in a former Model C school in the Gauteng province provided that she would be prepared to teach Bible Studies. Because of her confident attitude, openness and generosity, which she displayed as a child, while at university and as a young high school educator, the requirement did not undermine her integrity, ability or potential as a Bible Study educator. Her only concern was with the delivery of the right content, not the religion as such. For those reasons, she accepted the offer and committed herself fully to studying the Bible.

When she joined the school her own children became learners there. Although she was aware that they were going to be exposed to Christian religious education, she accepted the challenge of teaching them the Hindu religion at home since she regarded that as her parental responsibility. At no stage, as indicated in the analysis of her narrative included in this study did it even cross this participant's mind to convert to Christianity. She remained a Hindu first and foremost. What made a lasting impression on her throughout this experience was the trust which Christian parents placed in her integrity by allowing her to teach their children Biblical studies even though they knew she was not a Christian but a Hindu.

The study indicates that, after 1994, when changes to the way schools dealt with religion in education were brought about not all principals, very few for that matter, communicated the changes to staff and the parent body. Generally speaking, most of the schools maintained the *status quo*, *i.e.* the way in which religion in education was dealt with in the past. The study also revealed that in some schools parents openly disregarded the change. This reaction could possibly be explained by the community's perception of the principal as the custodian of religious knowledge and a respected and honoured member of the community. In some of the narratives analysed, it appeared that in some schools very few educators and some parents embraced the changes.

6.6 Religion in education—post 2003

As indicated in the preceding paragraphs, school principals were firmly rooted in their beliefs and approaches to religion in education when the National Policy on Religion and Education was released in 2003. The study established that principals in this study were aware of the release of the new religion policy but that most of them did not welcome it with open hands. Some claimed that it was not applicable to their single culture schools while others were unsure of the way in which they should approach it in their multi-cultural / multi-religion schools. Only two of the twelve principals who participated in my study indicated that they embraced the release of the new religion policy in their schools.

The study also found that when the policy was released for implementation, principals received little guidance from education departments on how to go about implementing it even though they attended workshops that informed them of the right to freedom of religion and expression to which every person was entitled. It may well be that the workshops were deficient in ‘unpacking’ the policy and that this could be one of the reasons why some participants felt that the policy was just brought to schools without any explanation. This could also be why principals, in their struggle to interpret and understand their role as policy implementers relied on their past experiences and remained promoters of Christianity instead of protecting human rights and promoting the values stipulated in the Constitution and SASA.

In Chapter 3 I argued that the past experiences of principals played a significant role in determining how they dealt with conflict or potential conflict. This was confirmed by the interviews, which indicated that principals were more inclined to ignore or simply sub-contract into policy, than they were to mediating policy changes.

6.7 Principals’ experiences of religion policy implementation

As indicated in previous chapters, one of the functions of a School Governing Body is to draft and adopt school-based policies, including religion policies. The role of the school principal, as stipulated by the Education Laws Amendment Act, is to assist the governing body in the performance of this function and responsibility. It is in this capacity that the government expects him to ensure that the school governing body performs its duties in a lawful, fair and reasonable way. By implication, the principal should see to it that the religion policy is discussed at parents’ meetings before it is adopted.

This said, the study indicates that the way in which principals performed this duty, with specific reference to the drafting of a religion policy for their schools, placed them in one of four categories. The *first* category of principals simply relied on the senior management team of their schools who drafted the policy and then brought it to the SGB for approval. The *second* category of principals engaged the SGB in discussions but, in the end, made the decision on how the policy would be implemented, coercing stakeholders to follow their directives because they were perceived to be in a position of power and authority. The *third* category of principals influenced decisions from the SGB election stage – mobilising participation of more parents from the dominant religion in case the need to vote on religious issues arose. In this category, much like the previous one, principals used their position of power to create a situation where some sub-contract into their stance on the matter. The *fourth*, and last, category of principals never brought religious issues to the parent body, i.e. the SGB, of which they are *ipso facto* members. Instead they made all the decisions without any consultation because they adopted the role of key decision maker on this body.

It is important to mention *four* arguments which principals who participated in this study used in justifying their thoughts and actions in this regard. *First*, principals argued that most parent governors were not educated and that those who were did not have the time or necessary skills to assist in the policy crafting process. *Second*, principals claimed that parents had no interest in school matters. *Third*, principals claimed that the training they received was insufficient and had a significant impact on the procedures they used in dealing with this matter. *Fourth*, so they claimed their position in the education structure but also as custodians of religious education — a status they acquired in the past — implied that their word, as the principal, was final.

All these responses and arguments suggest that the principals included in this study used their past experiences as children and as young educators rather than their management training as frame of reference when faced with the implementation of religion policies. An analysis of their narratives uncovered the following reasons for their decisions. In the *first* instance, they claim, they did not receive the training they should have from either the department of education as part of professional development or from higher learning institutions as part of teacher education / training. This claim is dubious since all of the principals who participated in my study were enrolled in post-graduate courses in education management and were trained in policy and education law matters. In the *second* instance they claimed that the workshops they attended were inadequate or insufficient in terms of what they needed as key

change agents. Again, this is less than plausible. All the policies introduced since 1994 would have required them to act as change agents and the numerous workshops on new policy initiatives use the same broad change management frameworks. Their *third* claim, and this seems to be the most plausible one, is that they valued the moral values and norms they obtained from Christian religious education so highly that they could not be persuaded to consider the possibility of introducing a policy that would change the way in which they had always dealt with religion in education. For those reasons, it was easier for them to either ignore the policy or simply to passively resist it.

The study thus found that principals ignored the policy and continued with Christian religious education — i.e. they maintained the *status quo*. Morning devotions continued in the Christian way while other, minority religions were marginalised. In some schools learners and educators subscribing to other religions were not allowed to observe their religions either in terms of dress code or in terms of worship whereas in others classrooms were provided for use by minority groups and Muslims were released to go to mosque on Fridays. In the latter case lost teaching time was never recovered and learners simply had to catch up on their own.

Concerning the teaching and learning of religion education in the Life Orientation programme, indications from my study are that educators who offered the learning area simply focussed their attention on their own religions and did little on other religions. The study also revealed that educators were not guided on how to approach the learning area. In addition, a lack of relevant material resources contributed to their inability and / or unwillingness to teach any other religion. Another reason indicated by the study is that most of the schools are populated with Christian educators who knew little if anything about religions other than their own. The final reason uncovered by the study was religious intolerance. An analysis of principals' narratives indicates that they equate the teaching of other religions as promoting those religions and degrading their own. Hence educators, under the influence of the principal saw it as their duty to focus more on Christianity and give little attention to the rest.

The study also found that departments of education contributed negatively to the success of religion policy implementation. Principals indicated that only fabricated religion policies that meet the requirements of the education authorities were collected from schools for ratification — the departments conducted no observations, did not monitor religion in education practices, or do anything else to ensure proper implementation of the policy. Principals also

mentioned that senior officials from the education departments set a poor example since workshops held for schools by departments were typically opened and closed with a prayer and singing of hymns, thereby sending the message to schools that the department is not serious about the new policy. Other religions were, and still are, never recognised. Some of the reasons for such behaviour were offered by principals participating in this study. The *first* is that departmental officials, like educators and principals, were not trained in monitoring or facilitating religion policy implementation. *Second*, they too, are products of previous Christian religious education thus, they find it normal to open and close meetings in that way, sometimes unconsciously. *Third*, they focus on schools' performance when facilitating and monitoring them hence those schools that perform well are never bothered, with officials taking it for granted that, since they are always good in doing their work, they would be implementing policies as required.

Indications from the study are that there are two approaches to religion education policy employed by school principals. One is a single-faith approach which makes provision for religious observances and religious instruction in one religion only. This approach was preferred by eleven of the twelve principals in this study. One principal was an exception. In his school leaders from other religions are sometimes invited to come and share insights of their religions with learners and staff. This principal also regarded it as his duty to establish a partnership with a publisher for the production of teaching and learning support material on religions other than Christianity.

The second approach revealed by the study is a multi-faith approach in which provision is made for parallel programmes in religious instruction, albeit for a selected number of religions. One of the participants regarded this as the most appropriate approach, indicating that in her school programme, each of the selected religions has a slot for members of all religions to observe their respective religion. Contrarily, the study found that, regardless of the religious experience one of the participants had overseas, he maintained the *status quo* in his school — Christianity is still the only religion observed throughout because, so he claims, it is a single-faith school with Christian learners only. For that reason, there is no need for other religions.

Tensions and dilemmas were also uncovered in principals' narratives. Some of these include parents, learners and educators who suffer the pain of exclusion in silence, assembly boycotts by some educators and learners, parents that explicitly ask for their children to be excused

from assemblies where Christian devotions are observed. All of these actions indicate that these individuals and groups are against the way morning assemblies are conducted. Principals brush these objections away by citing the school policy on this matter. They do not enter into any discussions with these parents or educators to mediate an amicable solution.

The study also found that, instead of resolving conflicts erupting from different religious interests in their schools, principals avoid such conflicts by either ignoring them or partially sub-contracting into policy directives by simply complying with the legislation instructions. The study refers to schools which adopted some of the clauses from the Constitution, SASA and the national religion policy into their school policies, not necessarily with the intention of applying them in their daily school lives, but to technically or administratively comply with the directives of departments of education. For instance, in most schools, Muslim learners are given time off to attend their religious ceremonies within school hours but no extra time is allocated to recover lost lessons.

Some of the principals who participated in this study indicated that they do discuss the manner in which their schools' religion policies are being implemented. They do this during the orientation of new learners and when interviewing applicants for vacant teaching positions. These principals believe that by doing so, they are being open and transparent, having explicitly communicating what happens at their schools in the area of religion education. A close analysis of their narratives revealed, however, that even though such religious practices are communicated to parents at meetings or in newsletters, the policy is presented as non-negotiable, as a *fait accompli*. The parent or prospective appointee is therefore discouraged from questioning the religious ethos of the school with the result that neither parents nor (prospective) appointees ever question or oppose policy or practice; instead, they accept existing conditions, thereby sub-contracting into the policy as implemented at the school concerned.

Four reasons for this kind of behaviour emerged from an analysis of principals' narratives. The *first* is that, historically, parents' participation in school life is, even now, under new legislation, non-existent. Where it is allowed, it is minimal. Parents and their children are used to being passive recipients of the principal's decisions. The *second* is that parents and educators often do not oppose the voice of authority out of fear that they are putting the admission of their children at risk (parents) or out of fear that they might not be appointed (educators). The *third* is that religion policy changes and associated rights are not

communicated to parents, staff and learners. *Lastly*, many of the educators and parents are Christians and feel that their own convictions are catered for and accommodated. Since they have thus not been disadvantaged they refrain from speaking out on behalf of others.

Another finding of the study was that there are school principals who do not communicate the religion policies of their schools to parents, learners or educators, usually because religious observances are aligned to the religion whose members constitute a majority. Because most parents pay more attention to the subjects that the school offers and less attention to religious matters, they only realise that their children are exposed to a religious ethos different to their own when it becomes a problem. Even then, fearing repercussions, they suffer silently.

6.8 Findings

As indicated in Chapter 1, I aimed to find answers to the following questions:

- What are school principals' experiences with religion in schools?
- How do these experiences shape their thinking about religion in schools?
- In implementing the National Policy on Religion and Education what role did principals play in the religious observance policy crafted by the SGB?
- What role did other stakeholders (e.g. educators, parents, learners) play in the crafting of the school's religious observance policy?
- What education management strategies did they employ to craft a religious observance policy?
- How does the principal deal with groups that contest existing views on religion in schools?

From the data presented it became evident that principals had both positive and negative memories of the way in which religion was dealt with during their own education, but that it had a major influence on how they dealt with religion in education in their own schools. Principals regard a single-faith approach to be the only way to deal with religion in education as, according to them, it allows them to promote moral values and acceptable norms and principles to learners and staff. For this reason they resist the new policy, arguing that it causes confusion and conflict in schools.

The data also indicates that principals regard it as their function and responsibility to draft and implement the religious observance policy of their schools. Informed by this perception they take the liberty to either make unilateral decisions or to do so in conjunction with the members of the SMT. While the SMT might therefore have some say as regards religion policy and practice in schools, educators and learners do not: they simply sub-contract into the policy as the principal implements it. For instance, they become part of the assembly where particular religious devotions are followed whether they like it or not. The SGBs of these schools, so the study indicates, does the same: they act only as rubber stamps to make such policies official in the eyes of departments of education.

Indications from the data presented in this study are that most of the principals who participated in the study have ignored the new religion policy. Consequently, Christian religious education is still dominant in most South African schools since it is the religion of the majority. Another conclusion, based on the same data, is that there is no indication of any mediating discussions. Put differently, principals in this study did not use mediation as a leadership strategy when dealing with conflicts that erupted as a result of religion policy implementation in schools although they had received training up to a post-graduate level and had been exposed to conflict management and resolution theory. It could be inferred, therefore, that the skill of applying their knowledge of these strategies in their own schools may not have been developed adequately.

When confronted by tensions and dilemmas, the data indicates, principals preferred to avoid them by either ignoring them or partially sub-contracting into the policy directives to show compliance with legislative instructions. The data presented in this study clearly indicates that in managing conflicts related to diverse religious interests, school principals selectively adopt certain legislative clauses for technical or administrative purposes that may help them align with the directives of departments of education, not necessarily for their application to the day-to-day running of their schools.

As to the main question that drove this study, indications from this study are that, in dealing with the National Policy on Religion and Policy implementation in schools, principals ignore the policy in favour of maintaining the *status quo*. When faced with conflicting religious interests, they partially sub-contract into the policy. Principals therefore do not acknowledge or use transformative mediation as a leadership strategy for conflict resolution in existing religious context in schools. There seem to be two possible reasons for this. One, principals

have not received training or are not skilled in the use of transformative mediation. Two, they lack the requisite set of knowledge, skills and attitude particular to transformative mediation processes.

There were exceptions, though. Some of the principals who participated in this study were confident, open and generous; they had the integrity, ability or potential to use their past religious experiences to transform the quality and nature of interaction in their schools. Some of these principals see themselves as spiritual beings having a human experience rather than as human beings who may be having a spiritual experience. Should they receive proper and adequate training, these are the principals who could assist the South African government in its attempts to facilitate the implementation of policies fraught with tensions, policies that could cause moral dilemmas in schools as regards people's understanding and expression of spirituality, diversity, morality and human nature.

Bearing these findings in mind, my recommendation in this regard is a threefold one. *One*, Higher Education Institutions should provide appropriate training: they should introduce suitable courses that equip principals with the knowledge, skills and opportunities present in those with a professional attitude, sound values base, determination for continuous learning, and commitment to being a key change agent. *Two*, institutions that already offer courses like these need to review, re-evaluate and re-organise their courses to include an emphasis on transformative mediation as a conflict resolution strategy that could be used in schools by school leaders. *Three*, provincial departments of education need to provide appropriate training for prospective principals as part of their professional development programmes, if only to address essential needs pertaining to the implementation of policies that could cause conflict in schools. *Four*, There is a need for empowerment of all stakeholders on the concepts **religion in education**, **religion education** and **religious education**. In doing so, there can be a common understanding of the concepts which can in return result in minimising conflicts associated with religion policy in schools.

6.9 Recommendations for further research possibilities

The current study began as an attempt to explore how school principals understand their mediating role in the implementation of the national religion policy in schools. The stories of their experience of different religion policies as children and as young educators as well as their perspectives on the ways in which these experiences have shaped their thoughts and

actions as well as the ways in which they deal with religion policy implementation in schools were then analysed. Further research that would broaden the scope of the present study would therefore be meaningful. The following research *foci* especially could make a valuable contribution to the educational system and could build on this study in several ways.

- 6.9.1 Research on the experiences of principals in institutions other than Christian-faith based institutions is needed. Such research may also deepen current understandings of the ways in which principals in other religious schools perceive their role in the religion policy implementation in schools.
- 6.9.2 There is a need to explore the experiences of parents, educators and learners from diverse religious orientations of the implementation of religion policy in schools and how they perceive and understand their role in this regard.
- 6.9.3 The role played by department heads in developing principals' understanding and knowledge of policy implementation, and their ability to generate the necessary support for successful implementation of religion policy in schools in particular is also a priority for further investigations.
- 6.9.4 Further research is needed on how religion education educators could bracket their preconceived perceptions, ideas and opinions regarding other religions since these could influence their teaching of such religions.
- 6.9.5 Research on how professional development and training could best assist school principals to shed off their past experiences and focus on real occurrences resulting from religious intolerance both locally and globally.

6.10 Final note

In this study I argued that conflict is part of human interaction and that policies that could cause conflict in schools should be subject to a process of mediation aimed at finding solutions which would meet the needs and expectations of all concerned. If the State is serious about transformation, education policies cannot be used as leverage, especially if they are simply dumped on schools without preparing those concerned on how to mediate its

implementation at schools. The study has shown that the release of the policy on Religion and Education was delayed until 2003 because of resistance from schools, the general public and religious institutions. It should have been anticipated by the education departments that the policy would also be met with resistance at school level, yet little has been done to prepare school principals for its implementation or for the conflicts associated with it. The State also underestimated the strong influence of educators and, more specifically, of school principals' past religious experiences on the possible implementation of the policy. Passive resistance against the alteration of school policies therefore resulted in their being altered to bring them in line with the administrative requirements of the State but never with the intention to implement them.

It was thus not merely a question of whether principals could mediate the implementation of the new religion-in-education policy but rather of how deep-seated convictions that would act against changes perceived necessary by the State could be changed. Because the majority of parents also resisted changes to the way in which schools dealt with religion, the small minority of parents in the schools surveyed never actively opposed religious practices at schools. A major insight that emerged from this study is that assuming conflict would require transformative mediation without understanding the complexities of the personal historicity and the socio-geographical configurations of communities is erroneous. Much more attention should therefore be directed to the training of principals to help them understand their own assumptions, values and beliefs and to realize how these may hinder the implementation of policies that could lead to transformed schools.

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Annexure A

Letter requesting for permission to conduct research



UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA,
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA,
YUNIBESITHI YA PRETORIA,
Faculty of Education

05 March 2012

Dean of Faculty
Groenkloof Campus
University of Pretoria

Dear Prof I Eloff

Request for permission to contact research in the University of Pretoria, Groenkloof campus

I am a third year Doctoral degree candidate in the Faculty of Education (Department of Education Management and Policy Studies) and wish to engage in a research study titled “School principals mediating change: the case of religion in education.”

Theory holds that a manager can either sub-contract into a new policy or mediate its implementation in a particular setting. Sub-contracting implies that the manager simply implements policy according to the wishes of a particular interest group or department of education. Contrary to this, mediating policy implementation requires that the manager negotiates with various interest groups to try and reconcile differences and finding a way in which the policy implementation fulfils the interests of various stakeholders. Over the last number of years numerous educational policies were developed in South Africa with the expectation that school principals will implement them as intended by government, but experience suggests that this is not always the case. In my research I will focus on understanding how principals mediate policy implementation or, alternatively, simply sub-contract into policy regardless of possible tensions that could be created by such a decision. Because of the need to come to terms with the complexity of the process, I have selected the National Policy on Religion and Education as an example which may reveal the intricacies of the process. Given the need to ensure that participants share their own stories of how they deal with the implementation of the policy, it is important to interview participants in their private capacities and not as spokespersons for a particular school or department. Secondly, it is crucial to select a diverse group as possible from rural, urban, different cultural and religious backgrounds. The post-graduate students enrolled for management programmes at

the Faculty of Education constitute such a diverse group. They are mature, have an interest in management and come from the range of diverse educational settings. I am therefore requesting permission to approach them to invite them to become participants in the research. Their involvement in the research will have no direct relevance to their studies and they will be interviewed at times that fall outside of their normal lecture and study responsibilities.

All participants will be ensured of confidentiality and anonymity. Informed consent letters will be issued to them for their signatures. These letters will clearly indicate that they will be participating on their private capacity not as spokespersons of particular schools, and that their participation is voluntary and they are under no obligation to participate and such a decision will not in any way be held against them. The letters will also assure them that they are free to withdraw from participating at any time. They will also be given the opportunity to provide written or oral comments on the draft report on findings.

Your kind consideration for the request is appreciated.

Yours sincerely



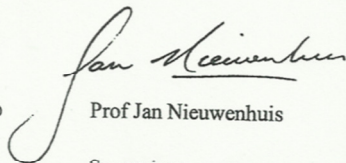
Albertina Maitumeleng Ntho-Ntho

PhD candidate

Student number: 27417532

Mobile number: 083 345 0753

E-mail: mnthontho2010@webmail.co.za



Prof Jan Nieuwenhuis

Supervisor

Tel: 012 420 2842

Fax: 012 420 3581

E-mail: jan.nieuwenhuis@up.ac.za

Annexure B Permission for research



UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA
YUNIBESITHI YA PRETORIA

PhD candidate:

PhD candidate:

Dept of Education Management and Policy Studies

Faculty of Education

University of Pretoria

Faculty of Education
Office of the Dean

23 March 2012

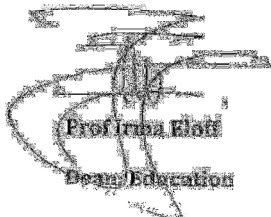
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PERMISSION FOR RESEARCH

With this permission is granted for you to conduct research on the theme of "School principals mediating change: the case of religion in education" as explained in the research proposal with the same title (dated 5 March 2012).

Best wishes on the successful completion of this important study.

Kind regards,


Prof Irma Klaff
Dean, Education

Annexure C

Invitation for participation in a research study



UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA
YUNIBESITHI YA PRETORIA
Faculty of Education

08 April 2011

Dear principal/deputy principal/HoD

Invitation for participation in a research study

I am a third year Doctoral degree candidate in the Faculty of Education (Department of Education Management and Policy Studies) and busy with research titled "School principals mediating change: the case of religion in education."

Management theory holds that a manager can either sub-contract into a new policy or mediate its implementation in a particular setting. Sub-contracting implies that the manager implements policy according to the wishes of a particular interest group or department of education. Contrary to this, mediating policy implementation requires that the manager negotiates with various interest groups to try and reconcile differences and finding a way in which the policy implementation fulfils the interests of various stakeholders. Over the last number of years numerous policies were developed with the expectation that school principals will implement them as intended by government, but experience suggests that this was not always the case. This research study focuses on understanding how principals deal with policy implementation in schools. I have selected the National Policy on Religion and Education as an example which may reveal the complexities of this process. I am interested to research amongst how you deal with this policy implementation in your school.

I would therefore like to extend an invitation to you to become part of the study. You will not participate as a student or as a spokesperson of your school or department of education, but in "your private capacity". Also note that you are not obliged to participate just because you are a student in this university. Your participation is absolutely voluntary. Should you at any time decide not to continue, you will be free to do so and your decision will not be held against you.

Confidentiality and anonymity are important and your identity or any details that will enable a third party to identify you will not be divulged. What you discuss and tell me will only be used for research purposes to assist me in understanding how principals deal with the implementation of complex policies.

It is foreseen that we will have three interviews at times when you visit the university and at times which will be convenient for you. The research will target the times when you are on campus for contact classes (BLD) and support sessions (M & Ds). This will not interfere with your lessons and sessions as interviews will only be conducted after lessons and during lunch times.

You will be given the opportunity to provide input on the draft report to ensure that it does not distort your story. All interviews will be tape-recorded and your permission to do this will also be appreciated.

Should you be willing to participate under the terms set out above, you are requested to sign the consent letter attached.

Yours sincerely

Alondra Mkhondlo Ntsho-Ntsho

PhD candidate

Student number: 27417632

Mobile number: 083 345 0753

E-mail: ntshoalondra2010@gmail.com

Prof Jan Nievejenhuis

Supervisor

Tel: 012 420 2842

Fax: 012 420 3581

E-mail: jan.nievejenhuis@up.ac.za

Classroom Teacher

I agree to participate in a study conducted by Albertina Madamela Ntso-Ntso on "School principals mediating change: the case of religion in education. I am aware that the research has got nothing to do with my school and I am participating in my private capacity not as a spokesperson for my school. I am also aware that I am free to withdraw my participation at any time should I wish to do so and my decision will not be held against me.

I understand that my contact classes and support lessons will not be disturbed and I grant the researcher permission to use some of my time and resources.

I understand that my identity and all that I will say in these interviews and tape-recorded interviews will remain anonymous and confidential.

I also understand that I will be expected to provide written or oral comments on the draft report on the interviews.

I grant permission for the researcher to use my name and the name of my school in the research report and any other publications that may result from the research.

I have received contact details for the researcher and the supervisor should I need to contact them about matters related to this research.

Signed: _____ Date: _____

Mobile No: _____ E-mail: _____

Annexure C Ethics Certificate



UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA
YUNIBESITHI YA PRETORIA
Faculty of Education

RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE

SUBMISSIONS CERTIFICATE:	CLEARANCE NUMBER:	ESR 11/2012
DEGREE AND PROJECT:	PhD	
	School principals mediating change: the case of religion in education	
INVESTIGATOR(S):	Albertina Matumeleng Ntso-llima	
DEPARTMENT:	Education Management and Policy Studies	
DATE CONSIDERED:	4 December 2012	
DECISION OF THE COMMITTEE:	APPROVED	

PLEASE NOTE

For Honours applications, ethical clearance is valid for 2 years
For PhD applications, ethical clearance is valid for 3 years

ACTING CHAIRPERSON OF ETHICS COMMITTEE: Dr. Suzanne Bester

Date: 4 December 2012

CC: Joannie Boukes
F.J. Mosenchuh

This ethical clearance certificate is issued subject to the following conditions:

1. A signed personal declaration of responsibility
2. If the research question changes significantly as a result of the nature of the study, a new application for ethical clearance must be submitted
3. It remains the students' responsibility to ensure that all the necessary forms for informed consent are kept for future queries.

Please quote the clearance number in all enquiries.