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**A DECADE OF EDUCATIONAL CHANGE: GROUNDED
NARRATIVES OF SCHOOL PRINCIPALS**

by

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DECLARATION

I, RENNIE ESTHER MPHAHLELE, declare that

“A decade of educational change: Grounded narratives of school principals”

Is my own work and that all the sources I have used and quoted have been acknowledged by means of complete references.

Signed: _____ **Date:** _____

R.E. MPHAHLELE



CARE OF LANGUAGE

I, the undersigned testify that I was responsible for care of the language of the thesis: A decade of educational change: Grounded narratives of school principals.

M.W. White

Date



DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to:

- My beloved husband, Daniel Mphahlele and our two children, Kagiso and Katlego for their unfailing support, motivation and understanding during my years of study. They have been there for me all the time and praying for my daily strength to bring this work to an end.
- To my late parents Abram Leburu Malele and Bachipile Anna Malele for the encouragement and support they gave me to go to school. My mother has been there for me, believing in me that I will always make it. She has been a strong pillar of my life and has always valued education far above everything. Her encouraging words have led me to reach where I am today. I wish both my parents were still alive just to tell them how I appreciate to have parents like them.
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- To all the South African school principals who are carrying the education of learners at their schools upon their shoulders to ensure that teaching and learning continue to take place. Continue doing the good work for the benefit of the South Africans.

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ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

CC	Curriculum change
DoE	Department of Education
HOD	Head of Department
SGB	School Governing Body
SMT	School Management Team
IQMS	Integrated Quality Management System
GDE	Gauteng Department of Education
PMDS	Performance Management Development System
SASA	South African Schools Act
NQF	National Qualification Framework
SAQA	South African Qualification Authority
LTSM	Learner Teacher Support Material
DET	Department of Education and Training



ABSTRACT

Since 1994 South Africa has changed dramatically in all spheres, not least of which in the sphere of education. Not only are all schools now open to learners of all races, cultures, religions and language groups, but class sizes have also been standardized leading to the redeployment of a number of teachers from previously advantaged schools. Many schools have also changed from being single-medium to parallel-medium or double-medium schools. Some schools have been accorded Section 21 status, which makes their school governing bodies responsible for the financial affairs of their schools while others have been altogether exempted from school fees. The State has also introduced feeding and school transport schemes and has launched a number of initiatives aimed at teacher upgrading.

It is clear, therefore, that the forces that led to political, social and economic change are now also changing school teaching, learning, leading and management. On the teaching and learning fronts schools have seen the introduction of two versions of an outcomes-based curriculum, the mainstreaming (inclusion) of learners who were previously marginalized because of mental and physical disabilities, and a new emphasis on active learning, critical thinking and group work. On the management and leadership front schools have seen the introduction of shared ownership of schools, with school governing bodies being tasked with school governance while the principal and his management team are responsible for the day to day management of schools.

The primary means used by the State to effect these changes in schools is the development of policies aimed at redressing past imbalances at schools coupled with extensive staff training, especially those staff members expected to ensure the smooth implementations of policies towards educational transformation. Since principals are responsible for the day-to-day management of schools it follows that they are the ones who represent the various departments of education at school level. They are also, however, the ones who have to ensure that the voices of the teachers, learners and parents

forming part of their school community are heard at government level. They therefore find themselves in the middle of two groups of people whose needs are often different but

both of whom they – the principals - represent. It is principals, therefore, who most often bear the brunt of change and/or are the target of criticism from above or below.

Being a principal myself I empathize with the position in which principals of South African public schools find themselves during these times of change. It was my personal experience, coupled with my exposure to other principals' experiences of change, experiences often discussed at principals' workshops and meetings, that made me decide to conduct an inquiry into principals' experiences of change. It was while I was reading up on the topic that I became convinced that the most appropriate way of investigating these experiences was through the collection and analysis of principals' first-hand accounts of change and the challenges change posed for them at a personal and professional level. I therefore opted to use narrative methodology in collecting, interpreting and presenting principals' stories of change.

Also informing my inquiry was the fact that, notwithstanding all the research that had been conducted into educational change in South Africa since the demise of apartheid, very little attention had been paid to principals' experience of change or of the real impact of change on schools and the people who worked there. I asked myself whether things had really changed or whether the changes were merely superficial. Informing my inquiry was an urgency to find out what has really been happening in schools since 1998, when policies were first implemented. Could policy makers really claim that what they had formulated translated as intended into educational practice, and would those changes be sustainable over time? What happened in the interim? What happened to school principals? What were their feelings and experiences about the educational changes that had occurred from 1998 to 2008? What are they thinking now? Have they changed as individuals? Have their performance, leadership and/or management styles changed over the years, and if so, in what ways and why? Put differently, what was new about the way they conducted themselves and/or managed their schools? Have they learnt anything during the past ten years that could assist them in managing their schools differently than they had managed them prior to 1994?

What I found was that, while the principals who participated in my study were very different in terms of culture, gender and personality, they were all challenged and are still being challenged by change and the way in which it has upset their own and their respective schools' equilibrium. Even so, none of them are entirely negative about the changes that have been effected. Rather, they all have their own ideas about how change can be sustained and utilized to improve not only the quality of education but also human and other relations in the country.

The conclusions I reached as a result of my research findings cannot be generalized across schools or made applicable to principals across the country since the study was conducted in a very specific region of the Gauteng Department of Education with a relatively small sample of schools. I am, however, of the opinion that the findings are significant in that they indicate commonalities and differences between principals that could be ascribed to race, culture, history and gender. Consequently I believe that, should the study be replicated in other contexts, it is quite possible that the same themes might emerge, thereby creating the possibility of making the kind of generalizations that could be of use to policy makers and/or educational change agents of the future.

Key words

- 1. Leadership**
- 2. Management**
- 3. Transformation**
- 4. Education management**
- 5. Curriculum change**
- 6. Communication**
- 7. School principals**
- 8. Agents of change**
- 9. Motivation**
- 10. Implementation of change**



***HOW CAN I REPAY THE LORD,
FOR HIS GOODNESS?***

PSALM 116:12