

**Working against and working towards: narratives of South  
African women principals**

by

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In the Faculty of Education, University of Pretoria

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## DECLARATION

I, Khumalo Keku Elizabeth, student number 27280455 hereby declare that the dissertation, Working against and working towards: narratives of South African women principals, is submitted in accordance with the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy is my own original work and has not previously been submitted to any other institution of higher learning. All sources cited or quoted in this research study are indicated and acknowledged with a comprehensive list of references.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

04 November 2016

## **DEDICATION**

I dedicate this research to my co-story teller Mrs Nalo, my co-workers, Mr KLD Mahanyele and Mr SJ Seletisha, and my family. They all contributed a lot in reducing pressure on me and ensuring that I completed this study.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would first and foremost like to thank my late mother Dr Nana Anna Ramatsobane Makhina Baloyi-Khumalo and my younger brother John Saity Khumalo. He was the main source of my inspiration who believed that I will one day graduate with my doctoral degree.

I would further like to thank my supervisors Professor Vimbi Mahlangu and Professor Venitha Pillay for seeing and believing in me. This work would not have been possible without them. I am especially grateful for their patience, helpful comments and suggestions, many of which helped me to shape and to complete this study.

I would also like to thank my friends and colleagues because their importance exceeds what words can express. A special thank you goes to my co-story teller, Mrs Nalo. Her openness and willingness to take part in this study motivated me more and encouraged me to probe deeper into my experiences.

Of course, my final thanks go to my children; Bonggi, Nkele and Basambilu for being the wind under my wings. Their love, encouragement, and belief in my abilities have been a constant source of strength to me.

## ABSTRACT

Although women continue to experience setbacks in senior education positions, few people know about that as their stories are rarely written nor told. This study is an attempt to tell such silenced stories about me and my co-story teller, Mrs Nalo. We are mothers, wives and principals of successful secondary schools in Limpopo province. The purpose of this study is to understand the experiences and challenges of women principals in a distinctly South African context. The study is a narrative of our stories with the intention of exploring our experiences so that I could better understand how our stories speak to challenges of leadership in South African Secondary Schools. My aim is to set my story alongside hers and to look for commonalities that offer insights into the stories of women principals in South Africa.

The study lends itself to combination of “auto ethnography”, ethnography as well as narrative approach. In carrying out this study we kept our daily journals. We engaged in three taped recorded conversations followed by a number of telephone conversations. I transcribed verbatim the three conversations and identified common themes across both stories and read them against the Capability Approach (CA). I took a positive and optimistic stance and recognised that we were not always able to achieve our desired functionings and that at times we were not able to realise fully the potential of our capabilities. The study again found that regardless of setbacks we encounter in achieving our functionings, we still managed to convert resources at our disposal to achieve them. I also found that although CA aims to enhance the developmental opportunities for those who have been marginalised, it turns a blind eye to invisible elements of women’s lives in their profession; that of being a mother and a wife. Its logic applies primarily to the professional aspects of women’s lives.

My final argument in this study is that prioritising the professional, especially for women, limits the scope and potential of a CA. CA therefore needs to wholly consider the complexities of being a woman leader, a wife and a mother, for women to be able to enhance their ability to use capabilities and resources to achieve much-valued functionings.

**Key words:** Auto ethnography, ethnography, narrative inquiry, capability approach, agency, functionings, women principals, South Africa; women and leadership; traditional practices; developing countries; secondary school leadership.

## EDITING CERTIFICATE

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**has been language edited on behalf of its author, Keku Elizabeth Ngobeni.**



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## ABBREVIATIONS

ANC	African National Congress
B.Ed	Bachelor of Honours
BA	Bachelor of Arts
BMF	Black Management Forum
CA	Capabilities Approach
CA	Curriculum Advisor
COO	Chief Operating Officer
CTT	Circuit Task Team
DA	Democratic Alliance
DMG	Deputy Manager Governance
DSM	District Senior Manager
FET	Further Education and Training
GET	General Education and training
HOD	Head of Department
KM	Kilometres
LDoE	Limpopo Department of Education
LFSC	Life Sciences
M.Ed	Master of Education
PED	Provincial Department of Education
PEU	Professional Educators' Union
PhD	Doctor of Philosophy
QP	Qualified to Progress

SADTU	South African Teachers' Union
SGB	School Governing Bodies
SMT	School Management Team
THP	Traditional Health Practitioner
UIF	Unemployment Insurance Fund
UNIL	University of Limpopo



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# CHAPTER 1

## Preamble

### 1.1. INTRODUCTION

After muddling through several ideas about how I should develop a PhD proposal, I began telling my supervisors a story one day detailing my experiences at the secondary school where I am the principal. My co-supervisor immediately stopped me halfway through and said: “every time you explain what you mean, you tell us your story. And I see you speak from your heart in these moments. Maybe you should think about telling your story in your research.” This conversation marked a methodological turning point. I came to the realisation that I had a story to tell, because I lived a storied life as a teacher and now as a principal. I realise that I can make sense of my world through experience, and was willing to share my experiences with my readers. In the article, *An Autobiographical Study of my role as an Instructional Support Consultant*, Dove (2001: 2) indicated that her life seems to be “a soap opera, which other people like to follow, waiting anxiously for the next update” on the latest events in her life. Dove (2001) further asserted that she enjoyed telling these stories, reflecting upon them, and living new stories; and that it is through telling and the reliving of her stories that she realised she had made the same mistakes again or that something she did actually worked. Through the encouragement of my co-supervisor and my own reading, I chose to write my story as a secondary school woman principal in a male dominated area. I continued reading theses and articles about women principals in secondary schools. When reading through an article by Howard and Irvin (2012) entitled *The Role of Obstacles in Leadership Formation*, I became motivated, knowing that almost all leaders that I heard of or read about went through hardships; and that the most important thing is learning from how they persevered through challenges. Reflecting on my own life, thinking of all the challenges and experiences I have had, I finally concurred with Howard and Irvin (2012) on the fact that perseverance is the master of success and “learning to persevere may take a lifetime.” Howard and Irvin (2012) further assert that good leaders work against all odds to finally get what they want. Narrating all the successes and achievements, failures and tolerance over experiences shows that we all have stories to tell. According to Grant and Zeeman (2012: 1), “we all live storied lives and our stories are relational, personified and performative.” Unfortunately, most of our stories are neither told nor written.

This is especially true for women whose silence about their lives has only recently begun to be broken. My study is an attempt to tell such silenced stories. I argue that unless we write about our lived stories, and disclose how we felt as we moved through our journeys as professionals and mothers, through marriages and divorces, very few people may learn from our challenges and experiences.

## **1.2. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

This study aims to understand the challenges that women principals experience and how they respond to such. In particular, the study foregrounds the successes of South African secondary school woman principals in an antagonistic and hostile education environment. Despite the increasing research on women leaders in education and the challenges they experience in countries such as the United States of America (USA), the United Kingdom (UK), Australia, Canada, New Zealand and South Africa (Uwamahoro, 2011: 2), “only a limited number of studies have examined the experiences and overall effect of African American female principal educational leaders” (Williams, 2013: 8). This research gap has led to the desirability of the present study based on my experiences as a woman principal in a secondary school and the underrepresentation of women principals in the district. According to Williams (2013: 1), women’s leadership has often been overlooked and underappreciated by researchers and policymakers. This study seeks to address the scholarly gap in research detailing the experiences of African women principals. It recognises that although there are significant affirmative action policies aimed at eradicating the racial and gender inequalities of the past, women principals remain under represented and plagued by numerous challenges that are frequently both directly and indirectly linked to them being women leaders. Such challenges include lack of support, encouragement, respect, role models, mentors, sponsors and networking; gender stereotyping and sexism; insufficient financial resources to run the school efficiently and to implement necessary programmes; the perceived scant regard that some parents have for women leaders, challenges with their staff, and being compared with their male predecessors; struggling to balance family and work; and often having to work with male colleagues who subscribe to a patriarchal mind-set that refuses to accept women as leaders (Naureen and Kanwal, 2011).

Although there is increasing research on the challenges experienced by women leaders in education, “research approaches were still skewed in favor of men, and when about women,

almost exclusively focused on White female experience” (Williams, 2013:2). Hence such have not do focused on black women leaders. I want to argue in concurrence with Williams (2013: 8) that the lack of research on African women principals might be caused by them being so few in numbers in educational administration. This point was reiterated by Tillman (2004) “when she lamented that limited documentation (support/evidence) existed in reference to the experiences of nine Black female principals” (Williams, 2013: 8). This study intends to address this gap in the research and will focus on two black South African women leaders; Mrs Nalo and I.

This study is a narrative of two women principals of secondary schools, and it is therefore important to know their experiences and challenges so that others can learn from them. I hoped it would offer a way in which other women would come to know themselves, such that they might see themselves as active agents in shaping the world. The study is rooted in my experiences as a woman principal of a secondary school. The core problem as I experienced it was that women principals of secondary schools are not taken seriously and their leadership abilities are frequently challenged and dismissed. This study intends to broaden the limited research base on black women principals by relating the lived stories and experiences of the two women principals through their own voices and to listen for strategies the women used to overcome the obstacles that have led to their current success in the face of adversity.

“For centuries the lives of women have been shaped by their reproductive, domestic and nurturing roles, while men have been concerned with business, science, managerial positions, and politics” (Uwizeyimana & Mathevula, 2014: 1203). Lindo (2012:1) indicates the existence of inequity in how women and men are perceived and treated despite the strides that have been made by women in numerous spheres of life. In agreement with Lindo, Mayienga (2013) asserts that female applicants are not viewed as suitable material for principalship by selecting officers, who are mainly men who are influenced by an androcentric conceptualisation (Ngcobo, 2006). Ngcobo (2006) further asserts that selecting officers view leaders as being men who are aggressive, rational and domineering as compared to women who are seen as gentle, nurturing, emotional and egalitarian.

Women are therefore regarded as outsiders in leadership and they continue to face gender-related challenges once in the post and need to win over their community before they are acknowledged (Sobehart, 2009). Because women were viewed as motherly, caring,

compassionate and collaborative, there is little information about their capability in managing and leading secondary schools.

This study intends to contribute to that knowledge base and to confirm conclusions and the existing literature that it is hard to be a woman principal of a secondary school (Kiamba, 2008 and Morojele, Chikoko and Ngcobo 2013). Women principals in secondary schools are often working against the odds, thus the title of this study: Working against and working towards: narratives of South African women principals.

### **1.3. SAMPLING AND SIZE**

I decided to narrate my story as a woman, a mother and a secondary school principal for this reason: In taking guidance from Guetterman (2015), who proposes that the size of the culture sharing group determines the sample size, and having read what Personal Narrative Group (1989 in Yang, 2011: 207) said about all autobiographic memory being true, I was mindful that given the small number of extant women secondary school principals, my story alone could have constituted a sufficient sample. However, I decided that the study would be better served if I told my story alongside that of another woman in similar context.

### **1.4. RATIONALE FOR MY STUDY**

My interest in this study arose from women principals' representation in our district, particularly in the secondary school leadership. The representation of women leaves much to be desired. In the circuit where my school is situated, I am the only woman principal amongst the eleven secondary schools, and the only woman in the School Management Team (SMT) of nine members. This under-representation of women in secondary school leadership is extensively evidenced (Mayienga, 2013; Marczynski, 2011; Pande & Ford 2011; Wrushen and Sherman 2008; Damons, 2008; Reynolds, White, Brayman & Moore 2008; Ngcobo, 2006). They agree that the number of women teachers outstrips men, but that the majority of principals are men.

The claim is further affirmed by the fact that Mrs Nalo, the co-story teller in this study, is the second woman secondary school principal in her circuit. In addition to being under-represented in secondary school leadership, women are criticised, undermined, and not taken seriously as principals by both their male and female colleagues.



## **1.5. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

The purpose of this study is to understand the experiences that South African women principals of secondary schools face as they lead and manage schools, and ways through which they succeed, nevertheless. It is recognised that the study is not generalisable to South African women principals, and that instead it offers an in-depth case study approach.

## **1.6. RESEARCH QUESTION AND SUB-QUESTIONS**

The study is guided by the following research question: how do the stories of women principals speak to the challenges of leadership in South African schools? Guided by my own story, I developed the following sub-questions: what are the challenges experienced by women principals of secondary schools and how do women principals lead in antagonistic contexts?

## **1.7. CHAPTER OUTLINE**

Chapter One outlined sampling, rationale, purpose of the study, research questions, delimitations and the significance of the study. Chapter Two offers a review of the existing literature on challenges and experiences of women principals in secondary schools. As a starting point, I reviewed what the literature says about women and leadership in education, their leadership styles, reviewed stories from other women principals across the globe, the challenges they faced in their lives, and the strategies they use/used to overcome challenges and experiences they face. Understanding hardships that women have to overcome, and witnessing their capacity to manage secondary schools, may make the people, often men, who form interview panels, realise that women need to have the opportunity of becoming principals like any other person, based on their capabilities. For the purposes of this study, I align myself with Hammock (2012)'s definition of capabilities. Hammock defines capabilities as those genuine opportunities that people have to achieve the lifestyle they have reason to value.

According to Hammock, people must be what they value doing and being freely, which means that they must have the freedom to do what they value without them being pressurised. The study may affirm the value of belief in oneself. This may, in turn, make women aware that they need to engage in more effective self-regulatory strategies, so as to be able to

persevere and overcome multiple challenges that come their way. This is why I chose the Capability Approach as a framework of thought for this study.

Chapter Three is an exposition of the methodology used to conduct the study. This study lends itself to combination of auto-ethnographic and the ethnographic approach. I also show how a narrative approach fits the two research designs. In particular, the methodology addresses data sources, data analysis, limitations and ethical issues associated with conducting qualitative research.

Chapter Four details my biography, how I transitioned to Mtzerere Secondary School (not real name), and how I managed to build collegiality there. In addition, I outlined the challenges I faced, the lessons I learnt as a woman principal and a mother, and have shown how I managed to work against and towards leading a performing secondary school. My purpose was not simply telling a story, but to offer an analysis of my experiences, while assuring women who may read this that it is possible to manage and lead a secondary school, despite the challenges that I faced on daily basis. To do this I adopted a stance of rigorous self-interrogation, where I confronted my own ‘truths.’ In developing the title of this study I realised that as women leaders we are often working against entrenched gendered notions of what women should be while simultaneously working towards changing traditional practices and beliefs about leadership. As a qualified traditional healer I value and preserve my heritage. But to me that does not include discarding the leadership potential of women.

In Chapter Five, I narrated Mrs Nalo’s story. It covers her biography; how she was brought up, her education, and how and why she finally became a teacher, her work experience as a teacher, her transition into principalship and difficulties in balancing work and family. The story also covers her leadership styles, her positive and negative experiences, and those activities that really distressed her and those which rewarded her.

In conclusion, the chapter details the strategies she used to overcome challenges she faced, and finally, to be the principal that she is, managing and leading a performing secondary school. In the final chapter, Chapter Six, I situate my findings against the literature review carried out in Chapter Two, and examine the commonalities of our respective stories, reading them through the Capability Approach. These commonalities include the ways in which we acted as agents, the ways in which our internal and external environments shaped our choices

as leaders, and how we converted our capabilities into opportunities. In this study, I give practical expression to the ideal of functionings, and suggest that the desired goal we each sought was to be a principal.

While I take a positive and optimistic stance in this final chapter, I recognise we were not always able to achieve our desired functionings, and that at times we were not able to realise fully the potential of our capabilities. I therefore argue that as professionals, leaders, mothers, wives and or divorcees, our capabilities and ability to assert agency is interceded by the complexity of our multiple roles. I also argue that although CA aims to enhance the developmental opportunities for those who have been overlooked, its focus and application is mainly on the professional aspects of our lives. I argue that CA needs to extend its scope to recognise the complexity of achieving functionings for women who are also wives and mothers as well as professionals. Emanating from the two stories, offer a discussion on learning points for women leaders.

## **1.8. DELIMITATION**

This study is limited to the experiences of two women principals of secondary schools, Mrs Nalo and I. Mrs Nalo was the second woman principal in her circuit but the only one who leads and manages a well performing school that is in the same category as the one I was leading and managing. Both schools are said to be performing based on the Limpopo Department of Education's benchmark. All those schools obtaining 60% and above are said to be performing according to the Limpopo Department of Education's benchmarking. Unlike Mrs Nalo, I was the only woman principal in my circuit. Both Mrs Nalo and I are African women principals and have some common cultural experiences and contexts. As such, the appeal of this story is likely to be limited to women principals especially, but not only, those for similar cultural contexts. The story is therefore not generalisable.

## **1.9. CONCLUSION**

In the final analysis, I argue that the logic of CA applies primarily to people who find themselves in a professional environment. As mothers and wives, I and Mrs Nalo sacrificed the two most important things in our lives for us to be able achieve our functionings as principals. As argued in the concluding chapter, real motherhood took backstage to pseudo-motherhood. We both felt we had to place the needs of our own biological children as

secondary to that of the needs of the learners, who became in some ways our pseudo-children. CA needs to wholly consider the complexities of being a woman leader, a wife and a mother, in order to enhance our ability to use capabilities and resources to achieve valued functionings.

## CHAPTER 2

### Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

#### 2.1. INTRODUCTION

“Although there has been concerted effort through research to bring the voices of women principals to audible levels, there is still a long way to go in bringing those voices to crescendo” (Lindo, 2012: 6). According to Wrushen and Sherman (2008: 4), “even though strides have been made, the fact remains that a dearth of information exists on women who have taken on leadership roles and what support their success”.

The literature reviewed in this chapter focuses on exploring experiences of women principals in secondary schools in the form of narrating stories. As a starting point, I reviewed what the literature says about women and leadership in education, their leadership styles, reviewed stories from other women principals across the globe, and the challenges women principal faced in their lives. I finally reviewed the literature on strategies women principals used to overcome challenges associated with leadership.

#### 2.2. WOMEN AND LEADERSHIP IN EDUCATION

Although affirmative action policies and quotas have been used in many countries to eliminate the inequalities of the past, the status quo in many countries remains largely unchanged. Kiamba (2008) and Morojele, Chikoko and Ngcobo (2013) maintain that women in management positions still experience a number of trials in practice as compared to their male colleagues. This endorses that discrimination on gender still continues despite all those Acts that are meant to exclude unfair discrimination in employment and guarantee that women are equitably represented at all levels of employment. According to Mayienga (2013: 1), “promoting gender equality and empowering women is the key to attaining human development, eradicating poverty, and developing economically”. Though researchers like Marczynski (2011) suggest that amendments to laws intended to close loopholes that allow for the continuation of gender bias in hiring processes should be pursued, I still think that as long as men are in majority in the decision making positions such as policy making, amendments that are called for will again favour men.

### **2.3. WOMEN PRINCIPALS' LEADERSHIP STYLES**

As leaders, women principals confirm compassionate, nurturing and cooperation as characteristics of their leadership (Lindo, 2012). According to Morojele et al. (2013), women principals adopt an open door policy and the shared management styles which assist them in creating teamwork and co-operation with the staff and learners. They assert that co-operation ensures accord at school so that they would encounter lesser opposition and build a sense of family where there is trust and respect. Lindo (2012: 69) pronounces women's leadership style as transformational because they are flexible, team-oriented and participative. In addition, Damons (2008) views women as talented, knowledgeable and dedicated.

According to Lindo's (2012) assertion, women's leadership styles are related with autonomous institutions, and build cultures that are inclusive and shared. In Sobehart's (2009) view, women principals are more likely to use humour as part of their leadership style and to resolve conflict. Mthembu (2007: 24) views female leadership style as more "communicative, consultative, consensus-orientated, student and curriculum-focussed". According to Lindo (2012), the above-mentioned attributes are inherent and valued, and are increasingly thought to be positively associated with positive management.

### **2.4. STORIES FROM WOMEN PRINCIPALS ABOUT BEING PRINCIPALS**

In her introduction in her thesis titled, "Voices from principalship: *The experiences of five women who are principals in Jamaican primary and secondary schools*", Lindo (2012: 1) points out that "much society has been built on patriarchy, which is a system of relations premised on the superiority of men as a class over women as a class". Lindo further asserts that patriarchy impacts system, policies, practices and not least of all, education. In her study, Lindo conducted a single interview where five women principals related their experiences. The five principals believed that despite challenges they faced, they have made excessive advances in their jobs. In agreement with Lindo (2012), Coronel, Moreno and Carrasco (2010: 1) in their article *Beyond Obstacles and Problems: Women Principals in Spain Leading Change in Their Schools* found out that regardless of many encounters that women principals faced, their experiences were positive in many areas. They also pointed out that; "school change; self-renewal and growth; relational and social networks with faculty; students and school community; and democratic and participatory styles of leadership" were regarded as effective requirements of their work.

Lindo was guided by the following research questions:

- What are the experiences of selected women principals at primary/secondary level in Jamaican primary and secondary schools?
- How do the selected women principals at the primary/secondary level in Jamaica view their experiences?
- What are the women principals' perceptions of relationship between their experiences and their gender?

In her findings, Lindo (2012) declares that women principals value teamwork. Another distinguished finding was the fact that women see caring as something they have to do as they lead, and they credited their Christian belief with their ability to progress in their jobs. Lindo further appreciated the value that women principals' place on the training of staff to make them prepared for leadership positions.

Under the theme, rewards and support, Lindo (2012) indicates that all the women principals viewed the accomplishments of their students in academics and in extra-curricular activities as most gratifying. The pride they felt for the developments their students made is related to their culture of care they portray into their leadership. Another experience that women principals viewed as rewarding was when they earned the support of those who were initially reluctant to support them. They believed that in order for the school to improve and for them to be operative in their careers, they need the support of all stakeholders, but reality is that it's rare for one to be supported by everybody. One principal in the study noticed how challenging it can be when the deputy principal is not on your side.

Another study that was reviewed and some findings looked at in this study is that by Wrushen and Sherman (2008). The intent of Wrushen and Sherman study was to illuminate differences and commonalities of women leaders from different ethnic backgrounds through their own voices and to listen for strategies used to overcome challenges that have led to their current success as secondary school principals. Eight women principals were interviewed and understood from a feminist post structural lens to create a vision of what the leadership experience is like at the secondary school level.

In the study conducted by Aslanargun in Turkey (2012), eight women principals spoke with pride about the advantages of being women principals in secondary schools. They perceived themselves as being able to have an open communication with students and it is easy for them to overcome barriers due to the courtesy and elegance of men superiors. Another advantage that women in Aslanargun's study pointed out was them feeling and their belief that they could handle hostile situations more easily than their male counterparts who might feel that he had to stand up to anger and return aggression. According to Aslanargun (2012), women principals are more associated with detailed energetic, transformative and inventive. The two women principals' assertions symbolized it clearly:

*We are soft and sensitive while handling the jobs and approaching people. ... since huge workload at home and training children are on our shoulders, we are more capable of designing environment as we do at home. We are trying to decorate job setting. We are more focused on details and qualified enough to read the small print but males are superficially tackling the issues.*

To decorate job setting in this case means that even after the appointment as a principal, women's voices are not heard. They are there to just fill in the gap because they are never taken serious. Men will always take the lead irrespective of them being subordinates.

According to Aslanargun (2012), women perceive themselves as diligent, considerate and devoted to doing a good job for students and staff. While the women interviewed represent various ethnicities, Wrushen and Sherman (2008) found that, for the most part, their experiences as secondary school principals were more similar than different. In agreement with Wrushen and Sherman, Aslanargun (2012) highlights the point that though teaching is mostly credited to women, but very few women are principals especially at secondary schools mostly because there is great resemblance between teaching and motherhood and women are associated with nurturing and caring roles and are said to be empathetic when facing difficulties; they are therefore not prioritized to jobs related to governance.

## **2.5. CHALLENGES FACED BY WOMEN PRINCIPALS**

“Life is full of obstacles and leaders tend to emerge from problematic family backgrounds” (Howard & Irvin 2012: 436–437). According to Naureen and Kanwal (2011), women supervisors face many difficulties in educational administration at secondary school level.



In her conclusion, Lindo (2012) realises that challenges that women face are the same in many different countries. According to literature reviewed, women principals face challenges such as: struggling to balance family and work; lack of support, encouragement, respect, role models, mentors, sponsors, and networking; gender stereotype and sexism; insufficient financial resources to efficiently run the school and implement necessary programmes; the perceived scant regard that some parents have for education, the school property and efforts of the school; challenges with their staff, being compared with their male predecessors and working with the man who acted as principals before their appointment.

### **2.5.1. Balancing Domestic and Work Responsibilities**

When speaking with all the women principals about their current family situations, Wrushen and Sherman (2008: 11) indicate that they repeatedly heard stories about the struggle to balance family and work. Some principals shared feelings of uncertainty on the part of them having children. One principal remarked:

*It's tough because we've been thinking about the children thing for a while and we want to do it. I just don't know how to do it. I don't know how to do it! And, you know, it's funny...when I was teaching and had different principal mentors and so forth, they were all divorced women! So, when I took this job on, I said, "Honey, this just puts us closer to divorce rate!"*

According to Wrushen and Sherman (2008: 12–14), “while for some of the women, the struggle with family was in determining how children and work could be juggled, for others, the struggle began with the notion of whether they found themselves capable of maintaining long-term relationships and marriages while serving as principals.” One principal said: “Never married. Had long-term relationships, but usually with other people involved in education so they understood the hours and ... never had any kids and I probably ... being in this job, makes me hesitant to do that.”

In their conclusion on balancing work and families, Wrushen and Sherman (2008) claim that women do not have role models in the form of women who have been successful jugglers of work and home. Researchers such as Morojele et al. (2013), Lindo (2012), Paulsen (2009), Moorosi, (2007), Shakeshaft, Brown, Irby, Grogan and Ballenger (2007) and Ngcobo (2006)

assert that the relationship between family and career was seen as a difficult one for women principals who had families.

In the study by Morojele et al. (2013: 202), women principals claim that they are “constantly confronted with having to navigate pressing demands to perform chores in their families, as well as their official school management duties.” In short, women principals perform double roles as professionals and homemakers while men principals have one role to play; principalship. To other women, especially in the study by Aslanargun (2012: 258), the issue of them being mothers the same time was viewed as an advantage. One principal remarked: “I care students just as my children, we are more involved with students, and it is our advantage to consider people and issues with motherhood compassion and sincerity.”

### **2.5.2. Building Confidence**

According to Kattula (2011), Moorosi (2007) and Moorosi (2010), women’s confidence was boosted by the practice male predecessors engaged in. They normally gave female juniors the opportunity to act on their behalf due to the fact that women were viewed as motherly. Their male seniors trusted them due to their caring, compassionate, collaborative, democratic and participatory attributes. The feeling of being trusted increased their (women) self-esteem and assisted them in discovering their capabilities. Besides being coaxed into doing the work for the male principals, some women educators were requested by the school principals to assist them in performing administrative duties (Moorosi, 2010). In Moorosi’s view, this assistantship became an indirect form of preparation long before women applied for principalship. Further evidence from the women principals’ accounts suggested that experience in middle management played an essential preparatory role. It is therefore evident that in addition to being a confidence booster, exposure to management made women visible candidates for the principalship even in areas where women principals of secondary schools have not been seen before. It is evident that women’s personal experience of exposure although mostly by default rather than designed, played a significant role in their preparations. Women also benefitted from informal mentorship from their predecessors in some cases, or their colleagues in others.

### **2.5.3. Support, Encouragement and Respect**

According to Kiamba (2008), another reason for women under-representation in secondary school leadership is lack of unity among women themselves. Kiamba further confirms that since women were competing for scarce resources, they tend to see other women as a threat and are jealous of one another. Instead of supporting each other, some women make it a point that secondary school principalship becomes very difficult for women who attained that position. Kiamba further noted that a significant number of women principals were subjected to insubordination from their male and female colleagues who would not accept their authority. Mthembu (2007: 5) observes how women are “unduly criticised, undermined and not taken serious by their male and female colleagues.” For other female principals, their male staff would clearly resist their authority and yet would respond positively to the authority of the male deputy principals. Women principals in Moorosi’ (2010) study further indicates that they were subjected to lack of respect and acceptance from the broader community and even from female and other principal colleagues.

This attitude according to women principals’ views in Moorosi’s study continues to display prejudiced cultural and traditional stereotypes about women as leaders. Morojele et al. (2013) indicate how women principals still respected and listened to their educators despite all the challenges they face. Morojele et al. further claim that women principals treat their educators like a mother to her children; and this makes them persevere and finally succeed in their leadership role.

### **2.5.4. Role Models, Mentors, Sponsors and Networking**

Given the historical background of inequality against women in South Africa which resulted in most of them not being able to be in positions of decision making, the women principals in the study by Morojele et al. (2013) report that they experienced a shortage of female role models as there were few such principals. In concurrence with Morojele et al., Ely, Ibarra and Kolb (2011: 9) assert that: “relative to their male counterparts, aspiring women leaders have less social support for learning how to credibly claim a leader identity.” According to Ely et al. (2011) people learn new roles by identifying with role models, experimenting with provisional identities, and evaluating experiments against internal standards and external feedback. To women principals and those who aspire being principals, it is important to learn from other women.

Ely et al. (2011: 9) further claim that “women’s under-representation in senior positions can also signal that being female is a liability, which can discourage would-be women leaders from turning to senior women for developmental advice and support.”

In support of findings by Morojele et al. (2013), Pande and Ford (2011), Sperandio and Kagoda (2009), Smith (2008) and Shakeshaft et al. (2007) concur on the fact that women do not receive mentoring, sponsorship or networking that their male counterparts have. According to Shakeshaft et al., mentors and sponsors are viewed as critical to the socialisation of women to the profession. Mentors help women to deal with hardships at work place whereas networking with other female leader peers, provides the necessary emotional, psychological and social support that is vital for survival in male dominated field of secondary school leadership (Moorosi, 2010)). Shakeshaft et al. (2007) argue that women have been marginalised from networking because the process of belonging is highly exclusive and male dominated.

The lack of networking blocks the advancement of women because they lack encouragement and connection needed to gain entrance to senior positions (Sperandio & Kagoda 2009; Smith 2008). Pande and Ford (2011) point out that even if it is worthwhile for women to aspire to leadership positions, they will not know this or be motivated to try unless they see other women filling similar positions, or are otherwise informed that these positions are open to them or is a place where women can be successful. According to Kiamba (2008), women in leadership positions should not be shy to display feminine traits such as being caring, empathetic, trusting, sharing and empowering. One of the principals in this study by Wrushen and Sherman (2008) speak about racial stereotyping standing out over gender. According to Wrushen and Sherman this principal went on to say that she had spent a significant amount of time gaining trust in her community. The principal realised that by working to gain trust and empowering the parents at her school, she had actually empowered herself and this brought joy on her side.

#### **2.5.5. Gender Stereotyping and Sexism**

Many women principals encounter gender stereotyping and sexism (Lindo 2012; Damons, 2008). Despite innovative advances in South African education system, gender stereotypes and women insubordination seems to continue to pose a challenge which shows that women are faced with unequal conditions as administrators (Morojele et al. 2013). According to

Aslanargun (2012: 255), “administration of schools and achieving the goals in democratic and transparent society requires gender neutral settings.”

Morojele et al. further assert that some women’s characteristics such as lack of assertiveness are the ones that degrade them from exercising their management abilities; thereby disseminating the stereotypes about gender roles in society. Damons (2008) asserts that sex stereotyping encourages sex attitudes that put women in an unfavourable position where men perceive themselves as having an upper hand over women’s work. Lindo (2012) reveals that many of the women talked about the frustration of not being heard as women leaders. According to Lindo’s findings, men are reluctant accepting women as leaders which in her opinion, speaks to the whole issue of male privilege because both genders have been socialised to respond to men as leaders; so women have to work harder to get those they lead to respond to them. Damons (2008) views women as limited to a position of dependence on men because they are said to be emotionally weak, whilst men are encouraged to suppress their feelings.

The literature on gender and management suggests that gender has a huge impact on women’s access and entry into positions of top management of schools (Moorosi, 2010). In Sperandio’s (2011) view, gender stereotypes that lead to women under-representation in managerial positions are experienced in many different countries. In South Georgia, Grubbs conducted a study of 41 district schools and found no high school that was managed by a woman (Smith, 2008). In Ghana and Tanzania, Oduro, Dachi and Fertig (2008) note dominance of male teachers in both senior and management positions. In Turkey, “management roles of the women is not so common when considering the schools in general as in the case for several states in the world such as Netherlands, Spain, USA, Scotland, Hong Kong, New Zealand and England” (Aslanargun, 2012: 256).

## **2.6. STRATEGIES USED TO OVERCOME CHALLENGES**

As indicated in the above section of challenges that women principals faced, it was clear that all leaders one way or another “had to learn to deal with crises and uncertainty in their lives. But, the type of hardships and the level of intensity are not necessarily of importance, as much as the individual’s ability to actively engage in the process of learning while navigating successfully through these obstacles” (Howard & Irvin 2012: 437). In their article, *The Role*

*of Obstacles in Leadership Formation*, Howard and Irvin (2012: 433) claim that the main “responsibility of a leader is to remove obstacles that present themselves to subordinates” which may help followers accomplish goals or successful transition through change. Howard and Irvin (2012) further assert that overcoming hardships enables a leader to empathise and sacrifice for their followers. The most important issue is to break this chain of men’s world in secondary school leadership in South Africa by role modelling resilience as a coping trait by women principals (Howard & Irvin 2012). According to Howard and Irvin (2012) future leaders utilize these difficulties as a training ground by overcoming them, not by quitting as it gets tougher. According to Howard and Irvin (2012), hardship is a requirement for one to can proceed in life, and persistence comes from the continued overcoming of obstacles of different degrees. In his argument, Howard and Irvin (2012) emphasise that resilience combined with confidence assists an individual in bouncing back by building self-efficacy levels to handle future adversities. Women in the study by Lindo (2012) assert that they worked diligently to rise above despite the presence of challenges they regularly faced. They realised that unless they devise strategies to overcome the challenges, their jobs will never be gratifying.

Women principals in Lindo’s study declare that through their adoption of collaborative leadership, care and mothering, and religious resilience strategies, they have managed to overcome gender and leadership challenges. Participants in the study by Morojele et al. (2013) bank upon their experiences and continuous learning for them to be able to understand complex matters in managing their schools. Portraying sound knowledge of what is required by this position as well as having extensive knowledge of management and governance of schools will finally ensure that people respect the principal. Being exemplary was also viewed as another strategy women used to cope with challenges at their schools.

To get the staff moving with them on their vision they try to include them in discussion and decision-making is another strategy they used. In addition, Lindo (2012) suggests that women principals acted like mothers to their students and value practices of care and emotional connection with staff members while remaining cautious of the aims of the organisation. They adopted half democracy and half autocratic management approaches whereby they allowed staff members to share ideas and be part of the decision-making processes while they firmly guided the proceedings to achieve the aims and objectives as planned (Morojele et al. 2013). In the studies by both Morojele et al. and Lindo (2012), women principals indicate that

they are more accommodating and are little bit calm in addressing the situation than men. Women principals in the study by Lindo (2012) pronounce the measures they enacted to increase the participation of the parents in the school activities. They held parenting workshops, Parents Days and bestowed honours on parents who give their support.

To reduce the challenge of inadequate financial resources, the women principals described the many ways that they and their staff have tried to raise funds for the schools. Although ideally, having the support of all stakeholders of the school is good, it is sometimes not likely that the women principals will have full support. According to Lindo (2012), women principals manage with whatever support they have, knowing it may not be a perfect situation. To overcome reading challenges that faced the students and school, programmes have been implemented with the aim of improving the reading levels of students. In short, women principals adopted a cocktail of strategies in order to survive as managers. Women in leadership in the study by Paulsen adopted a participative management style. They held regular meetings where parents were informed about issues regarding school fees and curriculum related issues and worked with limited financial resources allotted by the Department of Education (DoE) (Paulsen, 2009).

According to participants in Paulsen's study, they found it difficult to secure sponsors or receive funding from private companies and businesses as men who are managers of those sectors still regard women as not good managers.

## **2.7. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

### **2.7.1. Introduction (The Capability Approach [CA])**

This section outlines the CA as an important framework of thought for this research, its development, main claims and concepts; and finally explains the value of its openness and incompleteness.

### **2.7.2. An Outline of the Capability Approach**

The CA is “concerned with evaluating how well off people are in terms of their capability to achieve the kind of lives they have reason to value” (Wells, 2013: 12). According to Robeyns (2005: 95), CA is directly concerned with human capability and the freedom to explore such capabilities. This means that CA focuses on what people are able to do and be, and their



readiness and skills to do what they deem important in all aspects of their lives. CA argues that the freedom to explore one's potential is critical to one's well-being. My core challenge, the one that made me choose CA as my framework of thought is that it was and still is not easy for me to create opportunities for advancing my capabilities and to assert agency.

I come up with something new; some people quickly dispute that without evaluating its impact on the effective operation of the school, then the question: Is it because I am a woman principal? If the principal was a man, will the behaviour be the same? A CA offers conceptual inspiration to persevere. Having support to help one make appropriate choices is important. In that way, CA creates an enabling environment for people to do what they value and be who they want to be without being pressurised. CA is against judging people using anything except what they are able to do and what they want to be. According to Berges (2007), CA gives us a better answer to questions as to how we might measure people's well-being and which policies will be more conducive to their development. It guides policy makers in crafting better strategies to deal with issues of inequalities. CA argues that the right perspective from which to judge a person's well-being is the freedom of choice of the things he or she wants to do and how well he/she can succeed in doing that which he/she has chosen given necessary and positive resources.

### **2.7.3. The Historical Development of CA**

CA was first expressed by Amartya Sen in the 1980s and has been employed extensively in the context of human development (Wells, 2013). Sen first introduced the concept of capability in his Tanner Lectures on *Equality of What?* (Sen 1979) and went on to elaborate it in subsequent publications during the 1980s and 1990s. According to Gasper (2007: 337), CA “arose from the dissatisfaction and demand over income as concepts of well-being and from the longing that presents people as reasoning agents with the right to make choices”. This implies that CA is a method that focuses on people's ability to achieve the things they value.

According to Wells (2013), Sen notes that his approach has strong conceptual connections with Aristotle's understanding of human flourishing; and also with the work of Adam Smith and Karl Marx, who, each in their own way, discussed the importance of functionings and capability for human well-being. CA has more recently been significantly further developed by the philosopher Martha Nussbaum (Robeyns, 2005).



#### **2.7.4. Main Claims of CA**

According to Otto and Ziegler (2013), CA prioritises people's beings and doings as well as their opportunities to realise their competencies. This implies that CA is about one's effective opportunities to undertake the actions and activities that they want to engage in and be whom they want to be, to be able to produce outcomes that would enable each individual to realize his or her full human potential. It seeks to actively discourage pre-judging individuals or using stereotypes of gender, race, and social status to determine what they may be capable of achieving. In my case as the principal, a Tsonga speaking person in a Sepedi dominated society and a traditional health practitioner, the first time I was introduced to the SGB, educators and learners, I could feel the negative perceptions about me instantly; before I even assumed duty. I was not given the opportunity to do what I was there for, but was instantly assessed and my competencies were set aside. Other issues such as cultural beliefs, my gender and race were used instead of my capabilities. Robeyns (2006) argues that assessment of people's quality of life or judgements about equality or the level of development should not focus on anything except on the effective opportunities that people have, to lead the lives they have reason to value.

#### **2.7.5. Main concepts of CA**

##### **2.7.5.1. Functionings and capabilities**

CA focuses on what people do and the opportunities to do them; that is, one's quality of life. Further than a focus on whether persons do or do not achieve the particular outcomes of his/her choice, CA particularly assesses whether the person is free to achieve them, given the personal, material, and social resources (Otto & Ziegler, 2013). According to Alkire (2005: 118–120), functionings are various things a person may value doing or being; an achievement of a person; what he or she manages to do or be, “those beings and doings such as being nourished, being confident, being able to travel, being well-fed, being literate or taking part in political decisions.”

Hammock (2012) defines capabilities as genuine freedoms people have, to achieve lifestyles they value and emphasise that people must do what they value doing without being pressurised. Opportunity freedom usually allows people who do not wish to enjoy a functioning to refrain from it. The freedom that people should have and the availability of resources are foundations of CA.

In my case, my experience after being a teacher for eleven years, my education qualifications, skills and the availability of posts motivated me into applying for this post. In Hammock's (2012) view, central to CA is freedom in the range of options a person has in deciding what life to lead. As a teacher, I decided to be a principal and I now decide to share my experiences as a woman in a secondary school. I believe this study is an expression of CA to achieving my own functionings.

#### 2.7.5.2. Conversion and agency

Agency and conversion implies the ability to convert competences into functionings. According to Berges (2007: 17–18), “conversion of resources into valuable functioning differ from person to person” because people are unique and have different capabilities in different settings. The way people convert what they have into what they really value depends on their personal environment as well as social factors they find themselves in (Frediani, 2010). For example, all schools have funding from the DoE and they all raise funds differently but not all schools are as clean and safe as ours in the circuit. We differ in how we use such funding.

At Mtzerere secondary, we organise educators' team building sessions, motivational talks for both educators and learners, employ cleaners and registered security company just to mention but a few. But the issue of beautifying the environment and the ability to employ a registered security company at our school became a burning issue not because educators didn't want to be in a clean and safe environment, but because it was done by a woman who is also not of their race and not from their area and different from them culturally. In Frediani's (2010) view, how well one does that which she wants to do will always be determined by factors surrounding that person and her capabilities. This means that what people are able to achieve or how well people are able to function with goods and services at their disposal should be considered when their quality of lives are judged.

#### 2.7.5.3. Openness and incompleteness of CA

According to Wells (2013), Sen is against the concept of collective capabilities on the argument that “it denies the relevance of the values people may come to have and the role of democracy.” This incompleteness and openness of CA allow individuals to perceive space for themselves in all aspects of life. It allows people to be innovative based on their interest and

skills (Gasper, 2007). For example, when a person achieves a certain level of education, he/she then have an opportunity for employment she/he previously did not have.

## **2.8. CONCLUSION**

There are three critical elements of CA. Functionings and capabilities refer to what people do and the opportunities to do them, and refer mainly to the quality of one's life. Conversions and agency refers to the freedom to convert capabilities into valued functionings. Openness and incompleteness allows one to constantly explore one's agency to convert capabilities into functionings. Of critical importance in this study is the woman principal's agency to convert capabilities into functionings, in other words her ability to find ways to become an effective leader who has the opportunity to implement her leadership ideas and to grow as a leader. Agency is also aligned to her opportunity to serve as a leader and to win the confidence of the community she serves.

## CHAPTER 3

### RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

#### 3.1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the methodology of this study. In the sections that follow I show this study lends itself to combination of an auto ethnographic and ethnographic approach. I also show how a narrative approach fits this research design. Data sources, data analysis, limitations and ethical issues associated with the research are also discussed in this chapter.

#### 3.2. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study is to understand the experiences and challenges of women principals in a South African context. I do this by telling life stories of two women who hold leadership positions in secondary schools in South Africa as principals. One woman is me and the other woman is Mrs Nalo.

#### 3.3. RESEARCH QUESTION

The main research question guiding this study is:

- How do the stories of women principals speak to the challenges of leadership in South African schools?

Guided by my own story, I developed the following sub-questions.

- What are the challenges experienced by women principals of secondary schools?
- How do women principals lead in antagonistic contexts?

However, I was keenly conscious that using both auto ethnography and ethnography as methodology entailed the possibility that questions about my experience might not fit the story of Mrs Nalo. I therefore bore in mind that the questions outlined above were not meant to generalise, but to guide the research process. I began the study by using these questions as a guide only and aimed to adjust them as I heard her story. In the final analysis, I found

strong resonance between my story and hers and accepted that the research questions above served as an appropriate guide to ‘hear’ our respective stories.

### **3.4. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY**

Despite the fact that the Department of Basic Education has implemented on-going strategies and initiatives to transform the education system and has investigated ways of achieving gender equity in the education system, the teaching profession is still characterised by the unequal treatment of educators (Paulsen, 2009: 1 and Umahoro, 2011: 1). According to Wrushen et al. (2008: 2), lack of women’s voices in the literature on educational leadership is still a challenge, especially on their underrepresentation at the secondary school leadership level. In concurrence, Shakeshaft et al. (2007: 103 and Turner, 2004) confirm the fact that an extensive amount of literature has been written on women’s experiences as principals, but there remains a void that fails to include the lived stories and experiences of principalship from female voices that can enlighten others about pertinent issues of leadership in education. The gap in the previous studies is the limited studies in African women principals. I want to contribute to that knowledge base.

The study also adds to stories that had traditionally been excluded from educational research. It is important, because it may signal to other women principals who experience similar challenges. It is hoped that the study will help inspire and motivate other women on similar paths. This study may increase the belief in women that they can acquire the capacity of being secondary school principals. The study is intended to give courage to other women leaders; to build resilience and to show other women leaders that they are not alone. In Paulsen’s (2009: 4) view, “education has always been a masculine domain and female managers are under great pressure to perform”. Women principals are faced with challenges because they are women and which their male counterparts do not necessarily experience. Open and frank conversation about challenges that women principals experience is likely to contribute towards addressing these challenges and may be useful in formulating strategies for promoting and enhancing the situation of women in management positions in secondary schools. This study aims to contribute to the conversation on how women principals can succeed in the face of adversity. The study finally intends to raise awareness among policymakers that evaluations and policies should focus on what people are able to do and be, and on removing obstacles in people’s lives so that they have more freedom to live the kind

of life they have reason to value. The study also confirms the conclusions in the literature that show that it is hard to be a woman principal that women principals often work against the odds.

### **3.5. METHODOLOGICAL PARADIGM**

#### **3.5.1. Interpretivism**

This study is a qualitative study based on narratives, linked to an interpretivist paradigm (McEvoy, 2006: 67). According to McEvoy, the interpretivist paradigm places much emphasis on the way in which the world is socially constructed and understood. Interpretivists believe that reality is constructed by social actors and people's perceptions of it (Wahyuni, 2012: 71). McEvoy (2006: 67) further indicates that the research methods that are normally related to interpretivism are small-scale but powerful, and the interface between the researcher and the participants in the study is seen as an essential part of the research process.

This study employs interpretivism as its methodological paradigm in the sense that its task is to understand how people see, think and feel about the world. In Minsun's (2016: 33) view, seeking to explain the meaning of social actions is done through an interpretivist *verstehen* – which is an understanding of the lived experiences of people. Interpretivists, according to Hammersley (2012), seek to grasp diverse perspectives and to understand how institutions like schools or colleges operate. This study seeks to understand the experiences that South African women principals of secondary schools face as they lead and manage schools. According to Phothongsusan's (2010: 1) view, interpretive researchers do not regard the social world as 'out there' but believe that it is constructed by human beings. Phothongsusan further asserts that researchers seek to examine how humans observe and make sense of this world and interpret or give meaning and value to their environment and themselves. In methodological terms, interpretive researchers argue that why people do what they do, or why particular institutions exist and operate in characteristic ways, cannot be understood without grasping how those involved interpret and make sense of their world.

In order to understand the world of meaning, one must interpret it (Idowu, 2016). The strength of interpretive research lies in its naturalistic approach, relying on natural forms of human communication (Phothongsusan, n.d: 4). Therefore, the goal of interpretive research is to understand and interpret everyday happenings, experiences and social structures as well as

the value people attach to these phenomena, rather than to generalise and predict causes and effects as in positivism.

Wahyuni (2012: 71) asserts that in order to understand the social world from the experiences and subjective meanings that people attach to it, interpretive researchers “recognise that individuals with their own varied backgrounds, assumptions and experiences contribute to the on-going construction of reality existing in their broader social context through social interaction”.

This study interprets and constructs the experiences and stories of two people, Mrs Nalo and I. We seek to create meaning as we interact with the world in which we each live and work. We foreground our social interactions in ways that make such interactions the fabric of our stories. Of value was Mrs Nalo’s openness and willingness to share her life and insights with me, offering detail that exceeded my expectation. In so doing she silently encouraged me to ask tough questions of myself and, at times, to struggle with my own feelings and interpretations. In the final chapter of this study I subject our interpretations to a capabilities framework and show that women leaders work against all odds to finally achieve their functionings. McEvoy (2006) makes the point that interpretivism lends itself to a range of methodological approaches and data collection including focus groups, unstructured interviews, textual analysis and ethnographic case studies. For the purposes of this study I chose to use a combination of auto ethnographic and ethnographic approaches. I ground this decision in Wahyuni (2012: 70), who argues that interpretive research is “value bound, the researcher is part of what is being researched, cannot be separated and so will be subjective”.

Like any other methodology, interpretivism has pitfalls too (Minsun, 2016). Minsun mentions questions of how to escape predetermined biases of the researcher and how to ensure the integrity of one’s conclusions as some pitfalls of interpretivism. I would agree with Minsun’s (2016: 33 and Wahyuni’s, 2012: 71) views on the fact that there is certainly the potential for predetermined bias because I was telling my own story and was listening to another woman tell hers. In other words there was no external voice to mediate our constructions of our experiences. In addition I entered the field with prior insight of the research context but assumed that this was insufficient in developing a fixed research design. According to Idowu (2016: 181-182), triangulation in an organisational cultural assessment may help to reduce bias and increase validity. I argue that using ethnography and auto ethnography, as well as a

substantive literature review that focused on the experience of other women principals, served as a form of triangulation. In the final chapter, I show similarities between Mrs Nalo's story and my own, alongside resonances in the literature reviewed.

### **3.5.2. Understanding auto ethnography, ethnography and narrative inquiry**

#### **3.5.2.1. Auto ethnography**

I used auto ethnography and ethnography as my research method because they seem to be the most fitting methodologies for the stories I told, and I believe these stories from the heart have not been sufficiently told in South Africa. According to Custer (2014: 1), "auto ethnography is a style of autobiographical writing and qualitative research that explores an individual's unique life experiences in relation to social and cultural institutions." Moen (2006) reminds us about the interlinking between the individual and her or his context. Yang (2011) observed that people by nature lead storied lives and tells stories of them, and writes narratives of experience not in isolation from their context. This means that narratives capture both the individual and context. As a subject and a researcher in this study, I wrote frankly about my experiences. I had a series of conversations with my participant to hear her story about being a principal in a secondary school, but our stories were not the same as we are both unique with different capabilities in different environments with different interests and differ in how we convert our resources into functionalities. According to Ellis et al. (2011) auto ethnographers not only try to make individual capabilities meaningful and cultural experiences engaging, but also by producing accessible texts, they may be able to reach wider and more diverse mass audiences that traditional research usually disregards.

Auto ethnography permits the writer to write in an extremely modified style, depicting on his/her experiences to cover understanding about societal incidences (Wall, 2006). As the only secondary school woman principal in the circuit, very few people know what I am going through because my experiences were not open to public scrutiny. Auto ethnography helped me expose those experiences so that others may learn from them. Raab (2013) asserts that an auto ethnographical researcher strives to examine experiences in relation to people who have encountered similar experiences as a way to detect a pattern, theory, or thread inherent to the culture or group. In Moen's (2006) opinion, there has to be a sense of non-judgmental attitude and a sense of equality between the participants when narrating a story. In concurrence with Moen, I decided to narrate my story as a woman, a mother and a principal



of a secondary school together with that of Mrs Nalo, also a woman, a mother and a principal of a secondary school in the same district as mine.

### 3.5.2.2. Ethnography

In addition to studying myself, I studied another secondary school woman principal, i.e ethnography, which is a research method that is concerned with studying the other (Starr, 2010). My aim in this study is to set my story against Mrs Nalo's and write our two voices into a narrative of women principals in South African secondary schools. According to Raab (2013: 3) ethnographic researchers are unique in that they prefer writing about remembered moments which might have greatly impacted their lives. Raab further claims that the general public enjoys reading about the personal lives of others and it has a tendency to move the reader emotionally while helping the researcher to embody the experience. Brewer (2000: 18) defines ethnography as the study of real-life situations in which the researcher observes people in the settings in which they live and participate in their day-to-day activities. Brewer further highlights the researcher's role as that of understanding and explaining what people are doing in that setting by participating directly in it to guard against imposing meaning from outside. To prove that some women principals find it very difficult to do their work effectively in their institutions, instead of me spending all these time with Mrs Nalo in Mpuru Secondary, we had telephone calls daily and met regularly to update each other on what is happening in Mpuru school due to the uncomfoting zone she felt in the school environment.

#### **Ethnographic elements of this study**

I initially had an agreement with a woman principal who chose to be called Hazel in this study, but she withdrew a few days before we were to officially meet and discuss informally when we were going to do the formal recorded conversation. I felt very frustrated but luckily for me, two weeks thereafter we were invited to a workshop on curriculum delivery. When we were introducing ourselves, another woman indicated that she was the principal of a secondary school. Her name sounded familiar to me because I had requested the Deputy Manager Governance (DMG) in our district to give me names of secondary school women principals in our district and her name was among the few I had been given. During lunch, I went to talk to her, only to find out that she was the second woman principal in her circuit but the only woman principal of a performing secondary school. I then introduced myself again and told her that I was the only woman principal of a secondary school in my circuit and I

outlined my proposal to her about my study. She seemed interested and I requested her contact details.

I called her and visited her three times at Mpuru Secondary (pseudonym). She was initially reluctant to participate in my study but finally agreed. She chose the pseudonym of Mrs Nalo, and so was born the second woman principal in this study. We met regularly at her institution and at our homes; and had telephone conversations over a period of two years. The time spent gave her the opportunity to validate her own experiences of herself as a woman and a principal. Our regular meetings and home visits positively affected our relationship. Ellis (2007:5) states that with ethnographic research, researchers tend to become friends with the people they study during the course of doing their projects. Ellis (2007: 6) indicates how friendship occurred in her first ethnographic study. She hung out, joining in whatever her participants did and helped where she could. After many visits, the community members seemed to forget she was doing research. In other words, a key feature of ethnography is immersion in the lives of the respondents in their natural settings. Without doubt this happened with Mrs Nalo and me. The researcher-participant relationship has now changed into a friendship. I am involved in her life and that of her family. Gradually she started relying on me and I also relied on her. We are involved in each other's life; funerals, weddings, birthdays and urgent welfare checks. She in most cases forgets that I am doing my research with her.

During our last interview she confirmed that I am like the sister she doesn't have. In sum, my life and that of Mrs Nalo have become intertwined over time. In other words, the extended period of time that I spent with Mrs Nalo, the immersion in her professional and home life, contribute to the ethnographic elements of this study.

### **3.5.3. Narrative inquiry**

Moen (2006) defines a narrative as a story that tells a sequence of events that is substantial for the narrator or her or his audience. This study involves two secondary school women principals telling their stories of what is it to be a woman and a principal of a secondary school. Using both auto ethnography and ethnography as my study methods, the study becomes a narrative inquiry in that it is a way of understanding and inquiring into experience through collaboration between researcher and participant (Yang, 2011). Yang further indicates that viewed as a researcher method, narrative inquiry is to inquire into narrative

ways of knowing or studying “the ways humans experience the world and how they make meaning out of their experience” (Yang, 2011:202).

This according to Yang indicates that human beings have lived out and told stories about that living for as long as we can remember. According to Moen (2006), life itself might be considered a narrative inside which we find a number of stories. In Bell’s (2013) view, narrative has a natural sequential thread in that current happenings are understood as rising out of past events and pointing to imminent outcomes. This means that stories are always restructured in the light of new events, and that stories do not exist in a vacuum but are shaped by lifelong personal and community narratives. Narratives display the significance that events have for one another and assert that people can learn continually from stories as they read and relive them over and over again (Dove, 2001).

### **3.6. REASONS FOR CHOOSING AUTO ETHNOGRAPHY, ETHNOGRAPHY AND NARRATIVE INQUIRY**

It took me two years to know that I have a story to tell after I registered my Philosophiae Doctoral Degree (PhD). Every time I spoke to my supervisor and co-supervisor about my topic, I regularly was telling them about my experiences as a woman and a secondary school principal.

My experiences imposed themselves on my life until one day, my co-supervisor advised me to rather change my initial topic into the one that focuses on telling my story, which is auto ethnography and that of another woman principal of a secondary school; which is ethnography. Like Hendry (2007), narrative has held a commanding effect over my life and my interpretations of Mrs Nalo’s life. According to Hendry (2007) and Moen (2006), narrative research has been categorized as providing a method for telling stories and giving voice to those traditionally marginalized for them to be able to express the richness and nuances in their lives. This happens because narratives allow researchers to present and understand experience holistically in all its complexity and richness (Bell, 2013). In Bell’s view, people’s lives matter most in narrative approach than in other methods which look at outcomes and disregard the impact of the experience itself. Moen (2006) asserts that narrative research highlights the ways in which culture and society shape and is shaped by individual

lives. Narrative inquiry assisted me to systematically gather, analyse and represent my story and that of Mrs Nalo (Dove, 2001).

I chose auto ethnography and ethnography because they recognise and accommodate prejudice, subjectivity and emotionality, and my influence on the research instead of hiding from those matters or pretending they don't exist. According to Raab (2013), auto ethnography assists in exposing all the emotions through publicising and transforming. Telling the story uncovered different feelings within me as a writer. According to Custer (2014: 1), auto ethnography can be “joyful, sad, revealing, exciting and occasionally painful.” Instead of sitting at my corner, sobbing about being rejected or undermined; or rejoicing on what I think are best practices and achievements, I told my experiences and those of Mrs Nalo. Ellis et al. (2011) claim that as a witness, auto ethnographers not only work with others to validate the meaning of their pain, but also allow participants and readers to feel validated and/or better able to cope with or want to change their circumstances.

### **3.7. DATA SOURCES**

#### **3.7.1. Sample selection**

This study is a narrative of my story and that of another woman principal of a secondary school, Mrs Nalo. We are both principals of secondary schools, mothers and divorcees. My intention was to explore narratively our experiences so that I better understand how our stories speak to the challenges of leadership in South African secondary schools. In education, the sample size is determined by the size of the culture sharing group (Guetterman, 2015). Women leading secondary schools are very few in our district. For instance, I am the only secondary school principal in our circuit and my participant is the second woman principal. In addition to her also being in a male dominated area, we are both leading performing schools as per Limpopo Department of Education benchmarking.

As the study employs interpretive methods, I decided to use Mrs Nalo as my only participant guided by Phothongsusan (n.d: 2), who indicates that interpretive studies are idiographic and the use of small numbers has as its purpose not to generalise but rather to explore the meanings that participants place on the social situations under investigation. In McEvoy's (2006: 67) view, participants in interpretive research are selected using purposive sampling approaches on the basis of how useful they are likely to be for pursuit of the inquiry. I

purposefully chose Mrs Nalo and engaged her in several conversations in order to achieve high quality information as per Ritchie and Lewis (2003) who advise researchers to retain depth of data collection rather than breadth in terms of sample size.

In support of Ritchie and Lewis' advice, Idowu (2016: 180) affirms that Interpretivism lay stress on depth rather than breadth and is not aimed at generalisation. Guetterman (2015), Onwuegbuzie and Leech (2007) and Tuckett (2004) concur on the fact that there are no hard and fast rules and numbers are unimportant in qualitative research sampling. In general, Onwuegbuzie and Leech assert that sample size in qualitative research should not be too huge that it is difficult to extract thick, rich data. In concurrence with Onwuegbuzie and Leech (2007), Ritchie and Lewis (2003) emphasise that sample sizes needed to be kept to a reasonably small scale. This means that researchers are to be very careful when sampling, it has to be a purposeful sampling rather than random sampling.

Onwuegbuzie and Leech (2007) further note that too small sample sometimes makes it difficult to achieve data or theoretical saturation or information redundancy. In this study, because I engaged in several conversations with my participant, I achieved high quality information. Ritchie and Lewis (2003) advise researchers to retain depth of data collection rather than breadth in terms of sample size by limiting samples.

Whilst there are no closely defined rules for sampling size according to Tuckett (2004), I chose to stick to two participants but taking into consideration the fact that I need to achieve information redundancy on women's experiences in their work as secondary schools' principals in a South African context. Telling my story, which is auto ethnography; and telling the story of another woman principal which is ethnography, this study produce meaningful, accessible and evocative research that is grounded in personal experiences of how is it to be a woman in South African secondary school leadership (Ellis et al., 2011). According to Michelle et al. (2016: 121), "although Interpretivism seems to be partial to studies drawing on the accounts of a small number of people, it would appear that certain traits of this method may have some value in studies where a close investigation of the practices and meaning-making activities is needed". This means that it doesn't matter that two participants were used in this study; what is significant is that the study shows the depth and richness of reality.

### 3.7.2. Data collection

In carrying out this research, I explored all the experiences and how I felt as they happened, anything that I remembered. My first draft of my proposal in which I explained why I wanted to do this study formed the foundation of my data. I kept a daily journal throughout until I felt that I have exhausted the stories I wanted to tell. I requested my participant to also keep her daily journal wherein she talked to herself. I further requested her to record every little thing that happens or happened to her as an educator and a principal; how she felt and reacted or responded in her personal journal for a maximum of between 4 and 6 months. Unfortunately, she told me she prefers talking from her heart; meaning she is not going to keep a journal; but the information she gave was sufficient for me to write this study. I didn't consider documents in this study as they do not reflect what it means to be a secondary school principal. I intentionally chose not to concentrate on them because from my experience, documents are for compliance' sake.

I was not interested in issues of conformity, but issues of experiences. For example, in complying, we draw year plans indicating dates and activities we intend doing, but due to emerging challenges, we do not adhere to such plans though submitted to the higher authority. My objective is to understand experiences that the women principals face throughout their principalship and what enabled them to overcome those challenges. Conversations played a major role in this study. I initially intended to have seven conversations with my participant who withdrew from the research. She decided not to continue with the research after she reported several commitments and failed to honour meetings. I then met Mrs Nalo from Mpuru secondary school and requested her to take part in the research. Initially, Mrs Nalo was very reluctant to participate especially because we didn't know each other personally.

I met Mrs Nalo over a period of two years with the aim of having at least five formal conversations in the form of interviews but due to demands on her time, we had three conversations following and followed by many informal telephone conversations and home visits. Our formal interviews became conversations as I increasingly involved myself and she was keen to give more information.

The following questions guided the conversations based on the challenges Mrs Nalo experienced and how she experienced leadership in Mpuru secondary school.

- What prompted you into becoming a secondary school principal?
- How did you feel about being a woman principal in a secondary school?
- Tell me all experiences you remember of being principal, bad and good experiences.
- How did you resolve those challenges that you think you managed to resolve?
- What stands out in your mind when you think of your position as a principal?
- Thinking about your experiences as a principal, what areas have you grown the most?
- Is there anything else you want to say about your life as a woman and a principal?

### **3.7.3. Data analysis**

During analysis of this study, I defined how commemorations may be strung together to demonstrate cultural behaviours and interactions with others in secondary schools (Raab, 2013). In order to uncover common themes, I engaged in the series of conversation. According to Ellis et al. (2011) when researchers write auto ethnographies, “they seek to produce aesthetic and evocative thick descriptions of personal and interpersonal experience by first discerning patterns of cultural experience evidenced by field notes, interviews and/or artefacts and then describing these patterns using facets of storytelling.” I conducted interviews in the form of open-ended conversations with Mrs Nalo.

All conversations were tape recorded as per our agreement. Following each conversation, I transcribed the audio-tape verbatim first. I at a later stage read the transcripts and summarised each verbatim. Representing and interpreting another person’s voice is not a simple task as indicated by Hunter (2010) because it needs respect and humility. Like Hunter, I continue to be grateful to Mrs Nalo for entrusting me with her story. In order to do her justice, I regularly communicated with her for me to ensure that I understand what she meant by each and every statement that seemed unclear to me. I deconstructed the data collected from our two stories and looked for common themes and sub-themes. This was not simple as our stories were not the same. What ultimately arose was a complex, intertwined process of analysis and writing up of data. But I finally got common themes which I coded as we both had experiences as women and secondary school’s principals.



I identified themes across both stories and took the core themes and described them in three chapters: an initial chapter is my story which begins with my biographical data; a second chapter is Mrs Nalo's story which also begins with her biographical data; and a third chapter, Elizabeth meets Nalo; which links the core themes from our stories and linked them to CA framework. It is in the last chapter where I finally produced a new contribution to scholarship in expanding CA.

In sum, "auto ethnography is a style of autobiographical writing and qualitative research that explores an individual's unique life experiences in relation to social and cultural institutions" (Custer, 2014: 1). CA assesses whether the person is free to achieve the desired outcomes given personal, material and social resources. Custer further cited Carolyn Ellis in the *Handbook of Auto ethnography*, pronouncing auto ethnography as a way of being in the world, not just knowing the world, one that requires living wilfully, expressively and automatically. CA is concerned with assessing how well people are in terms of their capabilities to achieve the kind of lives they have reason to value (Wells, 2013). CA like auto ethnography asks that we not only observe our lives but also be cautious on how and why we think, act, and feel as we do. They all seek to create an enabling environment for people to do what they value and be who they want to be without being pressurised. Doing what one wants to do voluntarily and given resources to assist him or her achieve what he or she intends to achieve is key in both auto ethnography and CA. Auto ethnography requires that we cross-examine what we think and believe and that we challenge our expectations, asking over and over if we have pierced as many layers of our own defences, fears, and insecurities as our projects requires.

### **3.8. LIMITATIONS AND ETHICAL ISSUES**

According to Bell (2013:210), "any research method has its limitations, and narrative is not suitable for all inquiries." Bell further asserts that narrative requires close cooperation with participants and acknowledgment that the constructed narrative and succeeding analysis enhances the researcher as much as the participant. I first defended my proposal and then applied for ethical clearance from the ethics committee.

I continued writing my literature review while waiting for the approval from the ethics committee. I got a conditional approval pending me writing a letter assuring the committee



that I do not know the other woman on personal basis. I indeed wrote that letter before writing and sending a letter requesting permission to continue with my study from the Limpopo Department of Education (LDoE) and the sampled principal, “Hazel.” Immediately after receiving a letter granting me permission to continue with my study, I got informed consent from my participant. I ensured that she understands that participating in the study is voluntary and that her real name and that of the school will be protected.

As a primary instrument and a participant in this study, I developed strong relationship with her so that accurate and valid insights are gathered; unfortunately, she withdrew from the study after we had two formal conversations. I was unclear as to why she withdrew. I then found Mrs Nalo of Mpuru secondary school (not its real name). Mrs Nalo’s name was one of two names given to me by the circuit District Manager Governance who pointed out that Mrs Nalo was the person leading one of the best performing schools in the district. It took me three meetings and several calls to convince her to take part in my study after Hazel’s withdrawal. Her reluctance was based on the fact that we didn’t initially know one another personally and professionally. I made it clear to her that I am also a woman secondary school principal and would like to hear other women’s experiences as principals in a secondary school that she agreed to meet me personally. We discussed the reasons behind my study and agreed to have no time limit fixed for the completion of each conversation. In order to save time and to allow for the flexibility of conversations, I itemized schedule of questions which were not rigidly followed as some questions prompted out of the conversation. In all the three formal conversations, Mrs Nalo was the one coming to my home because she didn’t approve my going to her place as it is near the school.

Coming to my home to chat helped to preserve confidentiality. Immediately after our first conversation, she seemed happy and enthusiastic and has never missed any day or time of our meetings. We continued having frequent informal telephone conversations to the point where we sought each other’s advice when we each had challenges at school and at home. It would be fair to say that Mrs Nalo and I have become strongly professionally supportive of each other. This relationship is supported by Bell (2013: 210) as indicated: “Exchanging stories is often understood within a larger story of friendship, so researchers may find disengagement difficult at the end of the research project”.

In concurrence with Bell, Ellis (2007: 10) indicates how ethnographers become friends with those they study because they cannot help themselves and because it makes their work easier while they are there. Ellis further advises ethnographers not to forget their primary role as researchers because friendship is secondary to their research purpose, and when they leave, their relational loyalties shift to their readers and their professional associations. Ellis believed that her job as an ethnographer was to learn as much as she could about that community and write an interesting and informative dissertation. Ellis's (2007) statement offered efficacious advice; although I became friend with Mrs Nalo, I didn't forget our main reason for meeting; to finally understand her experiences as a principal and a woman.

Given the sensitive nature of the study, I assured Mrs Nalo that all characters would be given pseudonyms to protect their identities. Mrs Nalo refrained from giving the three key men in her life names. She referred to them only by their positions; her uncle, the deputy principal and her husband. She did not want to accord them the dignity of a name.

I respected that because I also thought it to be proper because they had a negative impact in her life. We then agreed on the following; that I could audio-tape the conversations, that I could keep a note book and a pen in case of a power failure which didn't happen and that I could have conversations with her either on Sundays in the evening or during school holidays, at my home only, not her place of stay which is near the school.

### **3.8.1. Trustworthiness**

In Mphahlele's (2009: 22) view, the significance of any investigation counts on the degree to which the relationship between its central question and findings arouses assurance in the truth value of the outcomes and the trustworthiness of the inquiry as such. According to Damons (2008: 61), "for any study to be scientific it must be regarded as credible, reliable, believable and trustworthy by readers." In concurrence with Damons, LeCompte and Goetz (1982) assert that the value of scientific research is partially dependent on the researcher's ability to demonstrate the credibility of his or her findings. In addition, Damons (2008) views reliability and validity as key concepts in the trustworthiness of data finding and they deal with the assurance and certainty about the outcomes of the study. Van Niekerk (2009: 114) proclaims validity and reliability as two important concepts to be kept in mind when doing research, because in them the objectivity and credibility of research are at stake.

Van Niekerk views reliability and validity as the two concepts contributing to a study's trustworthiness. Paine (2005: 267) perceives reliability as a concept that relates to consistency, stability and dependability. In this study I did not seek to establish reliability because in Phothongsusan's (n.d: 1) view there can be no truly objective position for the interpretive researcher. Researchers become part of the research as a meaning-maker interacting with the other meaning-makers. Hamersley (2012) affirms that interpretive research becomes the construction of meaning between the participants, one of whom is the researcher himself or herself. Hammersley further declares that there is no unbiased truth which can be revealed by researchers and duplicated by others, in contrast to the assumptions of positivist science. According to LeCompte and Goetz (1982), reliability refers to the extent to which studies can be replicated. Unfortunately, in this study, which is auto ethnographic in nature, there is a shortcoming in relation to reliability because it dictates that a researcher using the same methods can obtain the same results as those of a prior study. This poses problems for auto ethnographic researchers because an incident in natural setting cannot be replicated, it is personalistic; no ethnographer works just like another (Nurani, 2008; LeCompte & Goetz, 1982). In LeCompte and Goetz (1982) view, even the most exact replication of research methods may fail to produce identical results because of naturalistic behaviour or unique phenomena of auto ethnographic studies. Hence it is imperative to understand and reveal meaning created by those involved in a particular setting (Damons, 2008).

According to LeCompte and Goetz (1982), even though the problems of reliability threaten the credibility of much ethnographic work, validity may be its major strength. Nurani (2008) further indicates that there is also one main problem dealing with validity because in ethnography it is not easy for a researcher to can maximally control external variables due to the long period of observation and the fact that the research is personally carried out in natural setting. However, the longevity in the observation gives positive effects (Nurani, 2008). According to Damons (2008) validity entails the extent to which accurate events are captured; which implies that what is intended to be measured is indeed measured.

In this study, I wanted to capture Mrs Nalo's story in line with experiences of being a woman principal of a secondary school. I started by narrating my own story which was not that simple. I uncovered many different feelings within me as I engaged in this writing; some were joyful, others were sad and painful.

But it was important for me to find meaning in my experiences and Mrs Nalo's experiences of being a woman principal of secondary schools. In order to ascertain that the findings in this study are true and accurate, Damons (2008) contends that this will be as a result of finding convergence among sources of information which in this instance it was me and Mrs Nalo. From this convergence, reality can be deduced. According to LeCompte and Goetz (1982), the claim of ethnography to high internal validity derives from the data collection and analysis techniques ethnographers' use. In my case, keeping my journal and Mrs Nalo's notes contributed to internal validity.

In order to ensure that my findings were credible, for over two years I engaged in many informal conversations when I visited Mrs Nalo at her work station and in the three formal conversations. The three formal conversations were tape recorded with her consent. We also spoke regularly on the telephone and every time we spoke we felt we had something to share. I was always brutally honest with myself and so she finally learnt to trust me and also became honest in what she said. I shared things with her that I have never shared with anybody, my mother included. I was not comfortable telling my mother that my marriage seemed to be in danger because of a jealous and inferior husband, who had started drinking heavily and being verbally abusive, for the mere fact that I knew she would say "I told you so". But speaking to Mrs Nalo about what I thought to be confidential, made her realise that she could trust me. My conversations with my supervisors also triggered many hidden concerns in me and I was able to address them more confidently after speaking to Mrs Nalo. It also helped me to get rich information while I questioned my assumptions.

After I had transcribed our formal tape-recorded conversations, I gave her a copy to read and gave her time to make comments and corrections, to ensure that all that I had heard and written was exactly what she wanted to say. Although researchers such as Mphahlele (2009: 114) emphasise the issue of considering multiple methods to collect, analyse and interpret data in order to produce reliable and valid knowledge in an ethical manner, I didn't use multiple sources of information in this study because of its nature, which is a combination of ethnography and auto ethnography.

### **3.9. CONCLUSION**

The research designs applied in this study were discussed in this chapter. Conversations with few guiding questions are the tools I used to collect data and the collected data was analysed in chapter six following chapter four and five presenting our stories. Ethics and trustworthiness were also outlined in this chapter.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **MY STORY**

#### **4.1. INTRODUCTION**

This chapter details my own biography, how I transited to Mtzerere Secondary School, and how I managed to build collegiality there. In addition, I outline other challenges I faced as a woman principal in a secondary school and the lessons I learnt as a woman and a principal through adversity. My purpose in this chapter is not simply to tell my story but to offer an analysis of these experiences. To do this I adopt a stance of rigorous self-interrogation, where I confront my own ‘truths’.

#### **4.2. BIOGRAPHY**

I am the third child of the late Dr Nana Anna Makhina Baloyi-Khumalo and Johannes Mhlaba Khumalo. I am the only girl amongst the four boys and the only one who has a Master’s degree (M.Ed.), and presently pursuing my doctoral degree. We were raised by a single mother, who was very soft, but who nevertheless knew and got what she wanted. I got pregnant at seventeen and married when I was nineteen years old, when I was expecting our second child. My mother declared the marriage incomplete until it was ordained by a white wedding. It was her wish to see me in a white dress. Because I had already had two baby girls, she agreed when my in-laws asked that I go and stay with them, so that they might assist in taking care of their children. Subsequently, when I was at my partner’s place, and was supposed to go back to school, challenges began. I think his family was already used to the fact that I was cleaning, cooking, fetching water and doing laundry for them, and they felt it would be a loss for them if I went back to school to do my Grade 11, which was referred to as Standard Nine then. Instead of him (my husband) supporting me to go back to school at that time, he told me to wait until we found ourselves a home of our own. That didn’t sit well with me, and I shared the bad news with my mother, who encouraged me to go back to school, indicating that she will take care of all the school needs, namely; the uniform, books, and bus-fare. I was then motivated and told my husband, who was already a police officer by then, and working in Pretoria. Instead of him being happy that my mother would be prepared to assist, he made it clear that he would not be coming back home if I disobeyed his family by returning to school.

Come January, I registered for my Grade 11, and he indeed didn't come home for nine months, and his four sisters and his mother refused to remain with my children when I went to school. I used to wake up at 4 am to sweep the yard and take my children to my mother's place so that she could take care of them until I returned from school. The routine continued for nine months, until my mother sent my brother to come and take us back home. That is when my husband decided to come home, and on a monthly basis he visited us at my home. My mother supported me while my husband went along with the views of his family. His lack of support hurt me a great deal, because he had promised to love and care for me in all circumstances. That care was nowhere to be found in just less than a year of moving in with him and his family. What they adored most was having a daughter-in-law, in the form of 'a housekeeper', who took care of everything in the house. Young as I was, I nonetheless believed it was not their place to dictate my own interests and my future. I regretted getting myself in that situation, but my pride deprived me of going back home, with the fear that my mother might say, "I told you so." They expected and enjoyed above all else when I woke up early in the morning, cleaning and cooking for them.

Once I had completed my matric, I registered at the College of Education. When doing my second year, my in-laws sent delegates to my home to request the date for a white wedding, so that we might return to their place. My mother refused. She told them that since I am still schooling, and they seemed not to want me going to school, she would not allow that marriage to go forward. She promised them that as soon as I was done with my studies, she would inform them of a prospective wedding date. I completed my third year, and immediately registered my BA degree with another university. After nine months of my completing college, my husband told me his family delegates were coming to ask for the date, as my mother seemed to be quiet about it. It was around 12 noon in the September holidays, and I had already left home busy writing an assignment at the nearby church, when his delegates came. My younger brother came and called me, but did not say why my mother was calling me back to the house. On my arrival, I found my husband's uncle, his brother and two other women. After greeting them, my mother asked me where I had come from. I reminded her that I told her I was going to study at the church. She further asked: "Are you still studying?" I responded by saying she knows I have registered for a Bachelor of Arts degree (BA).

She said: “thank you, that’s what I wanted to confirm.” She then told those delegates that unfortunately, she is not going to give them the date, as I was still studying. They wanted to discuss the matter and she kept her responses short and clear: “as far as I know, you don’t want anything to do with schooling in your family; so, as long as she still continues with her studies, she will do that while here.” I tried to tell her that we are going to have our own house but she didn’t acknowledge this. I wouldn’t say I was upset with her, because after all, the family handles me as if I was their slave. I wasn’t ready and didn’t want to go back to that family. My husband finally bought a house, after I completed my college education and was employed as an educator, and had registered for Bachelor of Arts degree. The marriage then went ahead, though I had some doubts on whether or not the marriage would succeed. I realised after some years that I committed a serious mistake by getting married to a man who wasn’t able to stand firm. I always think of what my mother used to say, that I was getting myself into a circus marriage. She always believed this, and knew I would divorce one day.

When in my house one evening, my late younger brother visited me and found me watching television. He looked at me, shook his head, smiled at me and said: “Eish, bra ya ka, one day you’ll wake up to realise the blunders you have made.” We used to call each other ‘bra ya ka’, meaning my brother. When I sat straight up looking at him with those astonished eyes he continued: “it will be too late for you and you will be telling people how intelligent you were in this family when I am in my doctoral red regalia, because you have a couch to relax on. People are studying outside, including me.” He then gave me university brochures and left. I couldn’t respond to him. I went through that brochure, and started applying for my Master’s degree. His words motivated me more than he could have known. I also knew that the family believed in me, and caused me to question why I would disappoint them, supportive and loving as they were. I concluded that since my mother had played her part, I must continue where she left off and indeed, bring a red gown into the family, and do it before my younger brother, because he was young. As a sister, my belief was that he ought to come after me in all the things. One Sunday morning, my brother came into my house and put a newspaper in front of me and said: “you have been a teacher for more than ten years now, and you have a diploma in educational management. This is your time to be the principal. I will come and collect your application forms for submission a week from next Thursday.” I indeed went through the advertised posts and then applied for a position at three primary schools. I was appointed at Ntlou Primary School.



I became the principal there, and after seven years, I applied for the same position at Mtzerere Secondary School. My younger brother's belief in my abilities was amazing, and most inspirational. He looked up to me and made me feel that I could do everything I wanted to do. I was invited for interviews at Mtzerere Secondary. Upon my arrival, I waited in a classroom, where five women were busy preparing food. They introduced themselves as members of the School Governing Body (SGB).

It took about fifteen minutes before I spotted a car through the window, approaching and parking just next to where I had parked my own. The security guard was directing the car to park where it is written "visitors only." I immediately assumed that the person was another candidate, and I then had mixed feelings. I was happy that I was not alone, but worried about the knowledge that the coming candidate might have. The thought of competition caused some stress, as it was my second interview following the one of Ntlou Primary School. It took about five minutes for the passenger to get out of the car. It was a tall, fit man with a black suit and a white shirt. I took a deep breath and immediately felt at ease again, knowing that I would not be the only candidate in that classroom. One educator rushed and took over from the security guard, who was accompanying the visitor into that room where I was seated. The remaining women whispered to one another, and that is when I overheard one parent representative stressing their agreement to recommend a male candidate. In support of what was said, the educator representative indicated how difficult learners and educators are, and the way it had not been easy for the outgoing principal to keep discipline, even though he was a man. They indicated how the school really needed a father figure to keep it functional. A feeling of uncertainty hit me, but I kept on saying I am going to give honest responses to all the questions, and consoled myself by saying, after all, I am already employed. I further calmed my nerves by asking myself this question: 'why do they say this in my presence, knowing full well that I hear them?' I felt that they were actively trying to scare me, so as to make me believe that women are not good enough for the school. What remained in my mind was that they were speaking of a male principal who was not able to discipline both learners and educators. Maybe, it occurred to me, this is a good time for change at this school, giving a woman chance to prove her. It did not take long for the candidates to grow to five, three of whom were men, and two of whom were women. We were then requested to move to another classroom, just opposite, where interviews were to take place.

As we got seated, the other woman candidate took out her notebook, and glued herself to the handwritten notes, and the three men stood up and started a serious discussion about their involvement in their various circuits as interview panel members. Each of them indicated the many times that he was the chairperson of interview panel, and how good is he on policy matters and regulations. Knowing that I had never become a panellist made me feel uneasy, and doubtful as to my own abilities. The only thing at this stage that settled me was the fact that I was already a principal.

### **4.3. TRANSITION TO MTZERERE SECONDARY SCHOOL PRINCIPALSHIP**

#### **4.3.1. Interview session**

I entered the class with one small table at the centre and an empty chair, one big table on my left-hand side occupied by two people, a woman and a man and big tables with five people, four men and a woman opposite the centred table. All tables were covered with cream tablecloths and jugs of water, with glasses on top. I greeted them and the DMG showed me to the empty chair. The two people were from the two Unions, South African Democratic Teachers' Union (SADTU) and Professional Educators' Union (PEU). The one who was introduced as the chairperson spoke politely with me, inviting me to feel at ease.

He gave a general introduction and asked his team members to briefly introduce themselves. Individually all the panellists were principals of schools from outside our district. I quickly viewed this as a neutral panel, which is usually composed when there are disputes or disagreements within the school. Usually, when a neutral panel is composed, this would mean that there are follow-up interviews, or that there was a reshuffle in the committee. Otherwise, when things are normal, the SGB traditionally composes a panel. They usually request three principals from their circuit to sit in the panel, and make sure that at least two members come from them (SGB), with the intention to carry out the mandate of the entire committee, with the Circuit Manager included in some instances. The chairperson further indicated that seven questions are to be asked, and briefly outlined the role of Union representatives; which are there to make sure that the process is just and fair, as observers. He further noted that I may ask them to repeat a question, not to clarify it.

In his closing remarks, the chairperson posed what I call a general question, which was not part of the seven main questions. He requested me to briefly tell them about myself, and

anything that I felt to be important for them to know about me as a candidate. After introducing myself, the panel, individually asked me questions, which I knew I answered well, based on my experience as a principal of Ntlou Primary. In his closing remarks, the chairperson thanked the panel first, and noted that he appreciated how I answered their questions. He asked me if there were any outstanding questions that they did not ask, upon which I wished to comment from my side. I thanked him for giving me that opportunity and quickly outlined my greatest contribution to Ntlou Primary, and how I motivate and encourage educators, learners and parents. I further indicated to them the input I might bring to Mtzerere Secondary, should I be appointed as a principal there. In conclusion, I thanked the interview panel and left the room.

I knew that I made a good impression on the chairperson's first question about me. I started by outlining my qualifications, where I knew I was going to beat other candidates with my Master's degree in Leadership, which most people do not have in our area. I then moved on to discuss my work experience, indicating that I worked in secondary schools with large student bodies, and in addition, that I was presently the principal of a primary school which gave me an added advantage on understanding learners of different ages. I further indicated my leadership styles, which assist me in having good interpersonal relationships. I finally told them about my innovative ideas, and the ability to take decisions. Finally, I elucidated my management skills, which are always geared to best results academically. This first question boosted my ego, and I knew immediately that I had compelled the audience. I was comfortable with all the questions, except the one on leadership and management skills. I felt the question restricted me into being that rigid principal, who wants to do things right according to the book, whereas I direct and lead to the right direction in a way that perhaps was not captured in my answer. I responded to the question in such a way that I felt I satisfied them. I indicated first how difficult it was for me to indicate how best I might manage the school without indicating how best I might lead the school. I knew what they were expecting; for me to show that I know the functions of a manager, that of planning, organising, leading and controlling. In addition, I indicated how I might ensure that I always give right direction in ensuring that we are on the same plate with my subordinates. I knew I answered more than they may have expected.

Before I got into my car, two men from a group of men and women underneath a tree came to me. They introduced themselves as educators at Mtzerere and started questioning me. I felt

they were trying to scare me though I could feel that they are in fact saying they prefer a male principal. I had to leave because I could feel that those educators were trying to intimidate me. I wondered to myself whether their being there at the gate was to interrogate each and every person coming from the interview, or whether they were targeting women specifically. Unfortunately, I was not able to verify this after I left.

Despite the fact that I had no experience as a panel chairperson or a member of interview panel in any school, I managed to answer all the questions. My ability to listen and the general questions asked in the beginning, assisted and motivated me. I understood all the questions and utilised the experience I acquired first as an educator and then as a principal to respond in a relevant way. Questions such as dealing with conflict, being innovative and involving communities in the running of the school, showcased all the skills and abilities I possess. I felt confident as I left the interview room. Winning or not winning the post was not an issue to me, what satisfied me was the fact that I had shown my capabilities not only to the panel but also to myself. Indeed, I had better insight into my own strengths and weaknesses.

#### **4.3.2. New beginnings**

It was the last Friday of the third month after the interviews at Mtzerere, when I received a call from the Deputy Principal, who was at the time the Acting Principal of the School. He requested that we meet in our local town that evening. As I was obliged to drive from Ntlou School 45 km into town, I wondered why he wanted to see me. I had a good feeling about the call. I thought that maybe I might well be the new principal of Mtzerere School. On my way, I was wondering about what I could say on the first day, as I address the staff of about 44 educators. On my arrival, I found him already there, waiting for me in a coffee shop. He asked if I would like to drink coffee or tea, and because of my uncertainty about the meeting, I quickly said: “water, please.” As the waitress put water on the table, the Deputy Principal congratulated me on the new post. I looked at him with shocked eyes, and he told me that he had been informed that I was the one selected to be appointed, and that he was happy for me.

I immediately asked myself, and could not understand how he could inform me about the official appointment informally so. I took a deep breath, and asked him how he happened to know about my appointment. He seemed very cool and said the Circuit Manager was at the school to prepare him, before she approached me. He continued telling me that he is happy for me and he is prepared to totally support. I had mixed feelings about the matter. It was like

I had two hearts, one very happy and the other one not sure. I felt blessed and terrified to be a part of a large and high-performing school, and I had doubts as it was not formal and not from the relevant person. Amazed as I was, the Deputy Principal seemed not to care about how I felt. He described their former principal, as a person with strong character, a deep-voiced man, who was always listened to and respected by all, before the divisions started. He further indicated that the principal was advised by his doctor to resign, as his health became weaker daily.

I didn't get too involved in the discussion, as I felt that he was trying to scare me, and didn't care about the impact of what he might be relating. I then thanked him for the good news, and left. The next day, Saturday afternoon, I got a call from woman who introduced herself as the Circuit Manager and asked if she was speaking to Mrs Mtungwa. She then immediately posed the following question: "madam, are you sure you can work as a principal of Mtzerere secondary school?" I immediately read what she was saying in light of what the Deputy Principal told me a day before, and responded as follows: "Yes Ma'am, and why such a question, if I may ask?" For a while, she was quiet, as if she was not expecting such a response and question together. She then said:

*It is because you have been appointed as the principal of Mtzerere Secondary School and you have to know that Mtzerere Secondary is the jewel in the crown of my circuit. It is my only performing school, and there is no way in which I am going to allow you or anyone to drag the school into a pool of under-performing schools. Do you get my point?*

I couldn't believe what I heard and didn't respond until she asked: "are we still together?" I sighed and said: "yes, we are still together." She then told me to come to the circuit office Monday morning at 07h30 to collect my appointment letter. I was certainly startled by her attitude and sensed disapproval and a lack of acceptance in her tone.

Why did she not think I would be able to lead the school? Is it because I am a woman, or because I was coming from a primary school? I left those questions unanswered, with the hope that answers might reveal themselves as time went on, but what is important is that I am an appointed principal of that school and appointments are done by the Head of Department (HOD) not her, so she would not be in a position to reverse it. The Deputy Principal and the

Circuit Manager's scare tactics really unsettled me. I didn't think it would be wise to reverse the appointment, but I was made genuinely concerned by their tactics. I believe they also thought that I would be persuaded by fear to decide to refuse the appointment. Knowing and believing in myself that I would be able to lead the school effectively, based on my experience, gave me the courage to hang in there. My ability to work with different kinds of people, and the pride that I won the post that everybody wanted, boosted my ego. I knew I would be able to handle any situation, and that coupled with the belief that my younger brother, who was already late by then, assured me that I am the best person to be there and no-one except me. I knew there was going to be more challenges ahead, based on what Mr Moripe and the Deputy Principal told me, but my interpersonal relationship with people from a young age convinced me I would be the right person, and I would be able to handle anyone.

### **4.3.3. FIRST DAY AT MTZERERE SECONDARY**

#### **4.3.3.1. Assurance and further threats**

It was a cool, clear Monday morning when I dressed in my suit and headed to the circuit office where I was going to meet the Circuit Manager. I arrived at 07h00 for 07h30 and waited for her at the door labelled 'Circuit Manager's Office'. As I waited, I wondered what kind of a person I was to meet and work with, judging from our previous conversation. She arrived after 20 minutes. I could quickly recognise her voice, as she shouted at one young man, a cleaner, who was busy mopping the floor. The poor man looked at her and said, "I am sorry, madam, I didn't mean to anger you this early on a Monday." She then looked at me and said: "morning."

I responded, but was not sure whether she heard me or not, because she was unlocking the door. She invited me in with that grumpy face and said, "you must be Mrs Mtungwa." I said, "yes". She kept quiet and continued with what she was doing on her cabinet. I felt ignored and could not shake the feeling that she was unhappy about my appointment. She then put a paper on the table. I did not take it until she took it and gave it to me, and told me to follow her as we drove to the school.

That's when I realised that the paper was my appointment letter. The tenseness that prevailed in the office continued as we moved down the stairs and we met her colleagues. She greeted them with a voice that seems to say, 'watch-out!' As I drove behind her, I was not sure as to

how she was going to introduce me to the staff and SGB with that attitude. Upon our arrival at the school, she came to my car and told me to stay there until I'm called in. I had already calmed my nervousness and glued to the newspaper when a soft voice greeted me through the half-opened window. It was a young woman. As I responded, she indicated that I am requested to come with her. I nodded and requested two minutes, as I looked myself in the mirror, put on my jacket, and took my handbag. I followed her into a classroom full of educators and the SGB, where approximately 52 people were present. I wondered how she could introduce me to all educators, because it was the role of the SMT to introduce me to the staff. Her role was to introduce me to the SMT and SGB. She welcomed me and told me to sit on the chair next to hers. As I slowly sat down, I could read puzzled looks on other members' faces. I pretended as if all was well, maybe it was because of my experience as a principal of Ntlou Primary and the lessons I learnt from my mother.

I sat with that confidence as the Circuit Manager introduced the SGB first, and then the SMT. She then turned to the staff and said, "colleagues, I present to you the principal of this school: Mrs Mtungwa. She is here to make sure that the school continues to perform." She then repeated what she said to me over the phone, that the school is her pride, and she expects it to stay the same, or to improve. She pleaded with everyone to support me. Based on our Saturday conversation, and her giving me a cold shoulder at the circuit office that morning, I didn't take her words at face value. She then handed over to the chairperson of the SGB, who welcomed me, and indicated that they were going to support me, and who wished we would have a good working relationship. He further indicated that they will convene a parents' meeting to introduce me to the parents very soon.

Finally, before he requested that they be excused, he indicated that there would be an SGB meeting the following week, so that they could bring me up to speed with the various aspects of school business. The SGB and the Circuit Manager were excused and Deputy Principal chaired the meeting. In his remarks, he highlighted the fact that time was not on our side as it was towards break time, and requested educators to individually introduce themselves. Before they could engage in introductions, I could hear a commotion indicating their dissatisfaction and disrespect.

I wasn't sure if they did that because the Deputy Principal was talking, or whether it was about me. Anyway, introductions started, some mixed with jokes such as, "wow, I am Mr



Zitha, and hope I am going to be your favourite educator, as I teach English. Other educators struggle a lot and I am the one who write their assignments.” As he finished, there was some more commotion, which made me uncomfortable. The Deputy Principal left the chair and requested me to take that seat as a way of starting my work as a principal. He then sat where the Circuit Manager was seated. I knew I had to address them. They looked curious as I greeted them again. They listened attentively as I said:

*Ladies and gentlemen, we all know the reason for our being here, and I believe that we are going to work together to ensure that learners perform well in all grades. I am not here to change that which you were doing well. From what I heard today, the school has been performing for some years now, and I hope we are going to improve its performance. Without any waste of time, be in the knowledge that my office is always open. I may not take questions now, or discuss anything with you, because of the heat in here, and the fact that it's lunch time. Please go and eat, and go back to your classes. Please will the SMT remain? Thank you.*

I was a little bit nervous addressing 44 educators. The SMT remained and the Deputy Principal requested that we go to the office. I introduced myself again, and told them that I bank upon their support for the school to be successful. My hope was to relieve the tension I had, but it worsened. I was the only woman in an SMT of nine members. The Deputy Principal led the discussion, and told me that they welcome me into the most difficult school in the area. He further said, “a very strong man, our former principal, ran away, and madam, he was taking tablets that could fill his whole hand. You must be careful not to end up like him.”

With the tension growing, I released them for a break. We finally agreed to have a meeting in the last period of the day. They thanked me and laughed as they left the office. Though feeling anxious, I appeared calm in the eyes of all stakeholders. My mother used to say: “give yourself time to digest matters that seem to want to irritate you. Get yourself a space to introspect, first breath in and out, and don't allow yourself to be harsh in your responses.” I also witnessed the fact that pretending as if all is well, and the ability to stay calm, especially in crisis, gave me time to think and it usually frustrates those who wanted to annoy me.



#### 4.3.4. Self-orientation

The office was quiet as they all left. I looked around and saw a cabinet full of trophies. The office had a thick, flowered curtain, which blocked out all light. I opened the curtains to get a good look at my surroundings in the office. On the left-hand side on the wall were four photos, the big one in the middle was for the former principal written “Principal – 1986 to 2007.” The other two were for educators, and the last one was for the SGB. On my right hand side, there were seven congratulatory certificates from SADTU. The school was awarded for outstanding performance, from 2002 to 2008. I then had mixed feelings, the school had indeed been performing, though had never obtained 100 per cent. The highest percentage was 82, in 2004. The question that made my heart pump faster was as to whether I would be able to sustain this good performance, considering the attitude that had been displayed by some members, not least of which the Circuit Manager? On second thought, I consoled myself by reminding myself that I would not be working with the Circuit Manager on a daily basis.

Another thing that made me calm was that results are not from one sector, which meant that I would have to encourage learners, parents and educators alike, in order to get good results. I then switched the computer on, and found very few folders and documents there. When I checked the time, I discovered that it was already 20 minutes after the last period, and none of the SMT members had come for the meeting. The Deputy Principal knocked and looked surprised to find that the others were not there. He said: “ma’am, I thought I was the last one, because I was still very busy. Where are other members?” I smiled at him and said, “Maybe they are very busy too.” He laughed, and as he wanted to go out to call them, I requested him to give me the log book, as I will not be coming to school for the next two days.

I told him I have to wrap my programmes up with Ntlou Primary SMT and SGB, and officially say my goodbyes to learners, parents and educators. He promised to ensure that the failed meeting would be held as soon as I return on Thursday. I asked him to stay with me in that office until we found another place for him, and he agreed. I left school around five in the evening, and received an anonymous call around eight. It was a deep, scary male voice, as if someone has put a towel on the mouth so that he is not recognised. He didn’t give me chance to say anything to him. He said: “shut up and listen. You are going to regret accepting the post at Mtzerere Secondary School. Don’t set your foot again there.

You are not going to make it. If you insist on being there, your life will be made a living hell.” The caller hung the phone up. I was shocked, terrified and anxious, because I did not have time to respond. I was alarmed and frightened at how he instructed me, to just shut up and listen. Had I started well with my Circuit Manager, I was going to report the incident to her, and requested to at least report at the Circuit Office until investigations into the matter were able to be done and completed. I was breathing heavily after the call, as if something was tearing at my chest. But knowing how the Circuit Manager received me, I instead of sharing my emotions with her, I called another principal I had worked with at my former circuit. I opened my heart to him, and we spoke until I felt better.

The next afternoon, I met Mr Moripe from Mtzerere Secondary School. He told me that they had a meeting chaired by the Deputy Principal, where they discussed my appointment. The SMT requested them to give them mandate to write a letter to the Circuit Manager informing her that the school did not accept me as their new principal. They wanted to recommend that I go and report to the circuit. Fortunately, some educators didn't support the idea. They had argued, “Better the devil we don't know, than the devil we know.” Mr Moripe's words boosted my ego. Knowing that there are educators who support my being there changed how I felt. I thanked him for the information, and told him that I would see them on Thursday, as I was still going to hand over to my former school's SMT and say goodbye to the SGB, parents and learners. This was not an easy thing to do. When I told the teachers at Ntlou Primary School that I got an appointment as a principal at Mtzerere Secondary School, I thought it would be the saddest moment, but telling learners on Wednesday was the most stirring. Seeing them cry became awful.

It was supposed to be a happy day for the community and learners of Ntlou Primary, because I had secured donors from Britain. They donated Grade R to Grade 3 learner's toys and a variety of teaching aids, and paid a local shop to give all learners from Grade R to Grade 7 full uniforms: jerseys, pull-overs, shirts, ties, socks, shoes, tracksuits and trousers for boys, and skirts for girls. We had organised that day to open the uniform, and had invited parents and members of the community. There was no way I could have postponed the function as a result of my new appointment. The function started well, with only educators and SGB members knowing that I would not be with them from the following day.

In my closing remarks, I thanked them, and finally told everyone that I got an appointment at Mtzerere Secondary School. The whole mood of celebration took a turn. Learners understood after hearing the responses from parents and other stakeholders. They then started crying, and that was indeed the saddest moment of my life. I wondered if I took the best decision to leave the staff, SGB, parents and learners, who really appreciated my being their principal to the community that seemed not to like me at all. I had mixed feelings, but the die had been cast, and I had already been formally appointed as the principal of Mtzerere Secondary School. I couldn't tolerate seeing them in that state. I left the hall for the office. After eating, someone came to confirm my leaving, and others just passed the office without saying anything, but I could see that they didn't take the matter well. I left Ntlou Primary School at 15h00. The day seemed very long to me. The cold reception I got at Mtzerere Secondary School made me unsure of myself. Experienced as I was from Ntlou Primary School, I knew what was expected of me as a principal. Receiving threatening anonymous calls and the depressing reactions of the Ntlou Primary School community made me doubt the decision I made to accept the new post. I couldn't tolerate the situation I saw at Ntlou Primary. I felt very bad and emotional. Though really touched by my saying goodbyes, I knew there was no turning back, and that I would have to go to Mtzerere Secondary, come the following morning.

#### **4.3.5. No turning back**

Around 18h00 that evening, I received the threatening call again. As I answered, the same deep stern voice continued: "I hope you made a good decision, you are not going to Mtzerere Secondary School. It is for your own sake."

I immediately demanded that the person stop being a coward and not hide his number, so that I can call him, or he has to listen to me carefully before hanging up. He hung up the phone. I prepared myself for the real first day at Mtzerere School, with a clear sense that the Deputy Principal didn't accept me. The Deputy Principal wanted the post desperately, and had mobilised those who were on his side to continue supporting him, according to what Mr Moriipe had told me. I woke up early in the morning, earlier than the set time on my alarm. I bathed, dressed up nicely and had my breakfast 30 minutes before the scheduled time of leaving. I had planned to leave and be at school thirty minutes before commencement, though I didn't have the office key, and didn't know when the Deputy Principal would be at school. As a principal, I always am the first to arrive and the last to leave.

It gives me time to re-check on my diary for the day and plan my activities when everyone else is not there in the afternoon. Punctuality is my norm. As I drove from home, I pondered what I would say at the assembly of more than one thousand five hundred learners, and what is it that the Deputy Principal is going to say as he introduces me. The thought that I am going to address more than one thousand five hundred learners and forty-four educators didn't bother me that much. My first school, where I worked, was at a high school with 46 educators, with approximately one thousand eight-hundred learners, and I had already coped well there. As I approached the gate, the security guard opened the gate. I greeted him, drove in and parked in front of the office, to carefully ensure that I did not occupy anyone's parking area. I was the first person in the yard. He came and informed me that educators were still coming. I said I would wait. Learners started coming in. After a while, the Deputy Principal arrived. I then took my handbag, and followed him into the school. We greeted each other and he showed me the time register, wherein I wrote my name in the last row. The siren rung and we went to the assembly. Learners were all dressed in red t-shirts, a black skirt for girls, and black trouser for boys. They looked neat and could not stop mumbling and whispering in my direction. I was ready to meet them and did not panic.

Looking around as they sung, there were only eight educators, and I was the ninth. I started wondering about the whereabouts of other educators, because according to the general timetable, the school knocks off at 14h15, which means that the starting time must be 07h15. A series of questions came to my mind: 'are they all late', or 'is the assembly not compulsory for educators', or 'are they angry and agreed amongst themselves not to come today'? As I looked around, I saw some coming through the corridor, but retreating into different staff rooms. After we prayed, the Deputy Principal introduced me to the learners in a lively voice. He said:

*My dear learners, we worked so well together for the past two years. I have this pleasure to introduce to you our principal (there was noise as learners seemed excited and clapped hands, and some whistled). I can see that you are happy and I am happy too. I thank you for the respect that you showed me during my time, and I therefore urge you to do the same to her. Ma'am, over to you, these are your learners.*

As I looked around, there were more than twenty educators at the assembly. I greeted both educators and learners first, and instead of asking them whether I am audible, I told them that I know my powerful voice will reach them all. I started by appreciating the beauty and neatness that I was seeing. I thanked the Deputy Principal for keeping the school the way it was. I then emphasised our core business, which is curriculum delivery; ensuring that learners are always in class and taught. I also emphasised that we are the ones who should ensure that our school is respected by all stakeholders by first respecting ourselves. They listened inquisitively, and I finally told them that I'm not only the principal, but also a mother, a counsellor, a leader, a manager and a friend to all. I then ordered them to disperse to their different classes, whereupon I proceeded straight to the office.

The continuation of threatening calls and Deputy Principals' tactics to influence educators was too much for me. I had my doubts which affected my sleep too. I woke up earlier than usual, and as a habit, I was always the first to arrive at Mtzerere School. My ability to treat people with courtesy always paid back. I was never disrespected by either educators or learners as an educator and as a principal at Ntlou Primary. Mtzerere Secondary School to me was not different, except that I was threatened. The anonymous calls really made me most uncomfortable. Not knowing the person making those calls made it a struggle to trust my new colleagues. I doubted everyone, especially at Mtzerere Secondary. I didn't feel safe around people because I wasn't sure who was against me. It is certainly better knowing your enemy than just moving in the dark.

#### **4.3.6. Getting to know each other**

As I moved through the corridors on my first day at Mtzerere Secondary School, three educators followed me. We got to the office, and they introduced themselves as the Site Executive Committee, representing educators for labour matters (SADTU). They told me to consult them before taking any decision, especially when it pertained to educators, to avoid conflict. They noted that I was also a SADTU member, and were happy that the school was 100% SADTU. They called it a 'closed shop', meaning that we all belong to the same union. I was ill at ease about their knowledge of me, until I found out that the former principal made it a norm to discuss everything with them. As they left the office, three other educators came in who introduced themselves as SGB teacher components. They indicated that the school had factions, and that it would be to my advantage to have that information. They also informed me about SGBs proposal to have a meeting on Monday at 17h00.

With the experience from Ntlou primary and my flash drive, I switched on the computer, opened Ntlou's monthly programmes, and then adjusted one to suit one week at Mtzerere School. It indicated all activities I intended doing in a week, and it was to be discussed in our first SMT meeting, for adjustments. Mr Zungu, an SMT member, was the first to arrive at the office and was shocked to find that I had already drawn and printed the programme. He was amazed and excited, and indicated that he had never seen such a real programme at Mtzerere Secondary. He commented: "I think we are going somewhere. You were here for two hours and you produced this document? Let me go and call other members for a meeting." Mr Zungu left the office without waiting for my response. He indeed called them and the meeting proceeded.

#### **4.3.7. As if it is not enough**

The anonymous caller called again. And it was clear to me now as to who was making those calls. I could recognise his voice after having several meetings, briefings and general conversations with nearly everyone at Mtzerere Secondary. I called a briefing immediately after the assembly, to warn them about the calls. I disclosed to have been receiving anonymous calls that threatened me about my accepting the post. They looked surprised and even the man I suspected pretended to be shocked. He was the one who responded first, asking "is that possible? Who can do such a foolish thing? People will be arrested."

I responded by saying that I agree with him, that people will end up in jail. I told them I have an idea of who is making those calls, and should it continue, I will open a case and let police investigate. Since that day, I no longer received any calls. As if this was not enough, the very same evening, around six o'clock I received a call from my Circuit Manager. She sounded furious, and told me to either work hard or leave that school. According to me, there was no reason for her annoyance. I had already heard that she had earmarked Mr Noko, who acted as a Circuit Manager before at the circuit, where she was the principal before her promotion into Circuit Management. He had been a competing candidate at Mtzerere Secondary School before I was appointed to the post. Thinking about the Circuit Manager's call, I concluded that she was still in denial, because her favourite candidate didn't win. She wanted to put me under pressure, thinking that I might change my mind, and either resign or seek out secondment to another school, such that Mr Noko might be called in. As the thought entered my mind, I told her to slow down, which she didn't.

She told me how much she valued the school, and heard that I am unable to deal with divisions and other management issues, and sometimes leave the school without her permission. I responded by telling her that those divisions are not my creations, that she is not my employer, and whoever tells her when I leave will do that daily, as I was not going to request permission from her from that day onwards. She hung up as soon as I gave her this piece of my mind.

After a few minutes she called again, and without giving me the chance to respond, she told me that I would not be able to manage the school. That's when I told her that we (me and her) are both employees of the Limpopo Department of Education. She was then quiet for a while, and I could hear from how she breathed that she was in shock and even more furious than when she had started. She clearly did not expect me to respond as I did. I told her that if she was my employer, I would quit there and then, and let Mr Noko come and lead the school as she wished. She hung up again. I sent her a text message instructing her not to come to "my" school until after five years, unless I requested her to come. The next day at about 07h15, she arrived at the school with the District Senior Manager (DSM). As they entered the gate, I went to the assembly. One educator came there as learners were still singing, and told me that the Circuit Manager says I must come to see them, as they were in a hurry. I told him to tell them to be in the office, or come join us at the assembly.

They sat in the office and I joined them thereafter. My Circuit Manager was already angry with my response and as I sat down and greeted them, she started shouting, showing no respect to both of us. The DSM tried to calm her down, as I was quiet and listening to what she had to say. She relayed that she considered what I said to her as improper, as she is my senior. The DSM told her to calm down so that he might assist. I was glad to realise that he understood her faster. I then took the opportunity to indicate to the DSM the kind of behaviour I'm exposed to day in day out. I capitalised on her behaviour, and told the DSM that he was with her for fifteen minutes and already tired, but that I was dealing with such behaviour all day long, day after day. The DSM further indicated that it was useless for him to come if she is not going to listen to him, as her senior. When she finally kept quiet, I looked at the DSM and said:

*Sir, from the day that we met, my Circuit Manager seemed angry. The reason why you are here is we do not connect. It is like she is a boiling cooking oil, and I am*



*cold water. You cannot mix us. She doesn't listen to me, and her attitude against me brought us to this meeting. From day one, Madam was not happy about my appointment, and judged my leadership and management skills before I could start with my work. Ask her how many times she asked me if I would be able to manage her jewel of a school. So, yes, I resorted to telling her that she is not my employer, otherwise I might have resigned already. It is entirely true that I told her not to return to my school for the next five years.*

She interrupted me, and the DSM ordered her to keep quiet. He mediated on the matter and she started realising that she cannot just say or do what she thought was best for the school without my consent, and that she cannot run the school through hearsay. He pleaded with us to try and find one another, for the school's effective functioning. I then thanked both of them for coming and they left. Even with my ability to stay calm in situations that are hot, I do get angry, but am decisive on what to say. It became clear to me on reflection that the Circuit Manager pushed me too hard, and that I forgot to treat her the way I am supposed to treat my senior, with respect. I had to tell her the truth, which I knew would hurt her, and give her an ultimatum. This was the first time that I took the school as my own. In my view, her desire to manage Mtzerere Secondary as if I don't exist was unacceptable. I felt undermined and belittled. The other thing that really angered me the most, however, was the fact that she had entrenched a spy at the school. She indicated that she knows my whereabouts every minute.

When revealing that, I felt that she really wanted to undermine me, and I was forced to give her a taste of her medicine, not to set her foot at that school for a period of five years. I was given a view of her character, and my refusing to leave learners at the assembly was my strategy of placing her in her rightful position. This caused her to openly show her disrespect, which although unpleasant, meant that the DSM was able to observe and understand her. I knew she would not hide that character. I suspected the DSM would realise that, and he did.

#### **4.4. BUILDING COLLEGIAL RELATIONSHIPS**

##### **4.4.1. Professional Conduct during Staff and Parents Meetings**

It was when we had finished our SMT meeting when Mr Lepara indicated how they felt when they heard that the newly appointed principal was a woman. He confessed:



*To be honest ma'am, our frustrations were worsened when you were called from your car into the office to be formally presented. What I saw was a pure model; i.e., tall, slender, beautiful dark-skinned woman. I reminded myself that the school is an educational institution, not a modelling agency. I decided to give you a chance immediately after our first staff meeting. You handled it professionally, and it ended well for the first time in many years.*

I listened carefully to what happened on that day, as Mr Lepara elaborated. He told me that they were all expecting turmoil. In contrast, he indicated that they were all shocked about the way I professionally conducted the meeting. They wondered what a former primary school principal would contribute to a secondary school as a principal. Mr Lepara further related the thoughts of one of my chief critics. He said it was the first time in many years that they held a staff meeting in such a professional and orderly manner, and this didn't sit well with the jealous Deputy Principal, who was sitting next to me. The outcome of that meeting caused a change in some educator's perceptions. Many admitted to one another that maybe they were prejudiced against me based on gender. They agreed to give me a chance, and to show some support.

Out of anger, the Deputy Principal made it a point to tarnish me to anyone who could 'lend' him their ears. For example, one educator said in a staff meeting, where it was observed that he was dividing the staff, and still viewing himself as a principal. He alleged:

*Mr Deputy Principal, you told us that since the principal is a traditional health practitioner, she obviously practises witchcraft. You warned us to stay far away from her, if we wanted to grow older. I'm not surprised if the SMT do what they are doing. These are all your deeds. This is what you have been doing to our former principal. Go and find yourself a school, since you don't want to be led. You had your chance here and you blew it, otherwise we had enough of you.*

Everyone was amazed by my composed response. In 2011, Salitic Training College invited us for a visit via the University of Limpopo (UNIL). They wanted to honour us as a family that is well known in traditional healing. It was me, my brother, seven other people whom we trained that year, and my mother, who was honoured in absentia, as she was disabled and unable to attend. We graduated at the university, and were awarded certificates written as follows:

*This certificate is awarded in honour of service to Doctor \_\_\_\_\_ for Preserving African Traditions, Customs and Leadership as Traditional Health Practitioner (THP).*

I organised a function at home so that we had lunch together and invited a friend of mine, a medical practitioner, to come and honour my mother by performing her graduation at home. All educators and support staff were invited to come and have lunch with us. That's when I heard the Deputy Principal telling a group of educators not to come unless they want to be bewitched. That's why I responded in a very calm mood to the educator's condemnation of the deputy, as he chose to articulate it. I further indicated that I understood the frustration of being a principal for a while, and then shifted to a lower level. I entreated the educators to empathise such that they might be able to assist him. The educators were quiet, and I was able to observe how amazed they were. Mr Zungu said he really admired my patience and character at large. One lady educator thereafter asked me to pass onto her the strategy of being able to keep cool, calm and collected even if a situation seems to become heated. My response was that I always try to think and plan my responses in such a way that even though I'm hurt, I do not want to give anyone who hurts me intentionally, the pleasure of seeing that he/she achieved his/her goal.

Another issue that gave me confidence in the turn of the tide in terms of support from my subordinates was the meeting on the school policy review. The SGB indicated their lack of capability to draw up relevant and implementable policies such as: SGB constitution, learners' code of conduct, cultural policy, finance policy, fundraising and others. In trying to assist the SGB on the issue of school policy, some educators volunteered to go and draft policies and bring them back for discussion and forwarding to the SGB. To my surprise, on the day of submission, none of them submitted, confessing that they had not drafted anything. I then drafted several policies myself, including teaching and learning policy and gave them out to educators to edit as they may have seen fit. When they resubmitted, I found no changes had been made.

I assumed they had not read the policies, and I was really concerned about how are they might implement those policies if they did not read them. We discussed those policies as a group of staff, and they seemed happy about them. This was witnessed by many educators, where one confessed: "for the first time we have a school policy relevant to our situation."

After the draft budget, one educator remarked: “at least, how our school finances are spent will be transparent. We never had such a privilege of knowing about finances at this school.”

This was done after we had discussed financial update at the end of the quarter and one educator commented, “wow, is this real? I thought these are only meant for the SMT, and not staff members. Us knowing how much have been spent for what and how much is left in the school account?” When others showed similar appreciation, the Deputy Principal’s crew questioned item for item. This meeting did not end well, which led to me deviating from the way I wanted to provide financial updates. I then started to give the balance brought forward, expenditure for those three months and the balance as on that given day. Those policies were then taken to the SGB for ratification and consolidated into a school policy. That was done without question. Educators and SGB started realising that their principal can lead them in areas where they lacked knowledge, which led me to gain their support.

Parents meetings in Mtzerere Secondary School take place on Sundays morning from 08h00 and educators usually don’t attend. One Sunday, the Deputy Principals and his acolytes attended for the first time. We were all surprised and the Deputy Principal quickly told me that he earmarked that some educators intended turning parents against me. He continued to say; “You see, madam, our educators do not usually attend parents meetings.

The day you see them, it means they want to say something bad against the management.” I then became more worried and anxious and asked him what he thinks they are here for. He answered briefly by saying he didn’t know, but advised me to just keep quiet, as my responses will be noted be used against me all the days. I had some doubts, and was not convinced by his advice and response. Keeping quiet seemed untoward, and I was not sure that I would be able to do that. I looked at educators present as they stood together. It was clear that the matter they brought there was of some gravity. I felt nervous, but pretended to be well. The meeting started at 08h30 instead of 08h00, with 86% of parents in attendance. In his remarks, the SGB chairperson indicated how happy they were to realise that parents have responded to their call in such great a number.

The meeting went well, until one educator raised his hand, and indicated how well they have been working with parents and the support staff. He spoke of his uncertainty on the work of support staff. He told everyone that if they are not careful enough, those people who are poor

and working so hard to keep learners in a clean environment, and to support their families, would soon be on streets because of the new management. He pleaded with all present to ensure that such people are protected. He concluded by saying, “we work here, we know what is happening recently and it is up to you to work with us to see to it that our people, especially those who have been with us for many years are protected.” Hands clapped and everyone started talking. The SGB chairperson seemed amazed, and did not know how to respond. I raised my hand, as I quickly understood what the educator was talking about, though I had no idea where the educator who had spoken had become privy to such information, because it was discussed in the SMT meeting he did not attend. I breathed in and out as my form of relaxing, and I told them that they have nothing to be afraid of, because the issue of whether or not to terminate pertained to two older ladies positions, who were still at managerial level, a matter about which even educators are not yet informed. I further told them that Labour Law insisted that we pay the Unemployment Insurance Fund (UIF) for all the employees, and that those who earn governmental grants are not in fact supposed to work.

I assured them that we are still seeking assistance from Labour officials on the matter, as the two women’s UIF was never paid since they started working there, and they are presently receiving social grants. I promised to bring the matter to their attention after having all relevant answers from those who understand the Law. I assured them that if need be, for the involvement of all parents in the matter, it will be communicated to them.

I could see heads nodding to prove that they understood the matter that had been misreported. Hands were clapped and one man, who introduced himself as Petrus, the father to Lesedi, a Grade 10 learner, stood up and congratulated the management for their thought to consult on the matter, as the school might be in trouble if those ladies’ UIFs are not paid. The chairperson of the SGB supported my statement, and added to it by saying: “it is unfortunate that sir (referring to the educator) heard what was not supposed to be heard by him at the present time, but follow-up will be done, and no one is going to lose his/her duty unfairly.” The matter ended up well-resolved, and the meeting was closed after I was given a chance to give closing remarks. Since my appointment to date, parents’ meetings are held every quarter, and parents seem to enjoy being there.

What really motivates them is getting their children’s academic progress reports and financial updates, or audited financial statements on the day of the meeting, which was not previously

undertaken. Parents seemed to warm to my way of doing things faster than the educators at the school, who remained divided even after holding several meetings. Everything that was done at school that seemed to be new, and there was some division over whether or not to follow my initiative. It was a really challenging situation that required ample tact to navigate.

#### **4.4.2. Stakeholder Involvement**

##### **4.4.2.1. Reporting**

The fact that I ensure that every quarter learners get their academic reports is one other thing that really caused both parents and learners to respect and support me. On a quarterly basis, we analyse results; first as SMT, then as staff, and then with parents, where the top-ten learners in a grade began to receive certificates for best achievement. To us, being in top ten was a significant achievement, as we have more than 240 learners in each grade, except Grade 12. This analysis was initially criticised by educators, as it revealed what is actually happening in each class, subject by subject. Some teachers felt that they are in a way exposed to others' scrutiny, as it would reveal how many learners wrote; how many passed; how many failed; the class average; and the pass percentage in each subject, class and grade. At first, those who were not attending their classes regularly mobilised each other, and agreed to stop analysing results. But it was at a later stage agreed that we owe this to ourselves and the parents, and this motivated educators to work harder than before, to be able to produce quality results, compared to quantity.

In fear of exposure, Grade Heads and subjects HODs started cooperating with classroom representatives (learners) in ensuring that contact time is well-protected; teachers are always in class teaching, and learners in class on time, learning. Class representatives control period registers, which indicates period number, subject, the name of the educator to be in class, minutes spent in class, and minutes not spent in class, absent learners during that period, and a column for comments. Every Friday, period registers are taken to Grade Heads for consolidation and reporting. This assisted in curbing absenteeism by both educators and learners. HODs started checking learner written work, moderating formal tasks before and after they were administered, tracking curriculum coverage and item analysing.

Parents and learners know that academically, we are taking care of them; we outsource experts' educators to come and address topics, or sections that seem to be challenging to our

educators, and we organise and conduct enrichment programmes and camps. We developed a log-book system, which educators keep and control. They record any bad behaviour by learners during their periods. For instance, if a learner didn't submit an activity, or if it is absent during the period or have misbehaved in any form, or failed the test or assignment, such a learner is recorded, and spoken to. If the behaviour continues, parents are invited in, and the matter is discussed, where the parent, child and the educator finally sign an acknowledgement, as a way of validating the evidence that the child has been uncooperative.

#### 4.4.2.2. Celebrations

##### **Memorial Service**

Another activity that I initiated and was supported by all educators was that of a Grade Nine learner memorial service. I called the SMT to first check with them what they usually do in case of death of either a learner or an educator. They indicated that they usually go to the family either on Wednesday or Thursday with learners. After I proposed to hold a memorial service at school, the SMT agreed, but as we called upon the educators for their views, some said it has never happened, and that they were not in favour of it. After long, serious discussions, they agreed to give it a try, and we did it with great success. All educators, parents and SGB were happy and satisfied about the service, and how it was arranged. I was at least reassured that resistance from educators, learners and their parents was being felt to a lesser extent.

##### **Heritage Day**

Another function that was not accepted by the Deputy Principal and his acolytes was a Heritage Day celebration, which was not celebrated before my appointment. Parents were also invited and encouraged to prepare relevant cultural attire for their children, and unique traditional dishes that learners were to display on that day. Likewise, some educators dressed accordingly, and took part throughout the day, whereas others spent the day in their offices, and coming out to take a glimpse at what was happening outside. Unfortunately, at this time, the Deputy Principal participated. He came to school looking very different, wearing his cultural clothes and his acolytes were surprised.

One educator called him two-faced, and he laughed telling her that “people must learn to think for themselves.” Year-in-year-out, the number of members in the group that was not forming part of the celebration gradually reduced. We organise and give relevant information that tried to minimise discrimination, where all cultures are included and respected. Learners, educators and parents are allowed to sing, recite and give speeches using their mother tongues. Educators from Zimbabwe, Ghana, Mozambique and Nigeria, also get chance to share the cultures of other countries with the school community.

### **Prayer Day, farewell functions & awards giving**

In the last week of October, immediately after trial examinations, I initiated and organised prayer days coupled with Grade 12 farewell functions and awards-giving ceremony. Parents, learners and educators enjoy this day, and were supportive of these functions. According to the Deputy Principal’s acolytes, the school ought to be understood as an activities-based institution, and they each and every year wished that matric results could drop. To their surprise, all grades’ results increased every year. My being calm assists me in many situations. There is nothing as hurtful as when you are called a witch. When I heard that for the first time, I confronted the Deputy Principal, who didn’t deny it. This is particularly painful in Limpopo Province, where people get burned for being accused of witchcraft. I made it a point to talk to the deputy alone about it, and when other educators openly made such accusations; I defended him, indicating that he feels humiliated for not getting the post I now occupied. I requested them to understand him. I further indicated to them that it is not easy for many men to lose a senior position, especially to a woman. Finally, I indicated that we must give him time to get over it.

My response surprised many of them, and some still ask me how I managed without punishing him, when they directly exposed him about this cruel issue. I was also surprised at my own composure. But as noted, my mother was a model of coolness under pressure, taking time in responding and assessing the mood and tone in which issues are discussed. I usually take time to respond and I keep my voice low and soft, even if I emphasise what I say in terms of the words I choose. That’s what I do, and it helps, because pertaining from all the meetings, most educators and parents knew they could rely on me for this.



According to some parents, portraying the knowledge that I had about labour issues to them, and the calmness with which I handled the matter, caused many parents to believe it is as if they themselves have their own representative. When educators are having conflicts, even before they bring this to the principal's office, they express their confidence in my ability to resolve matters. Having confidence placed in me by parents, educators and learners makes me feel good about myself. I have learnt that letting people know how much you care for them increases the chances that they will support and respect you. The fact that I do parent-child consultative meetings quarterly, after analysing results and doing a general report to all parents, made parents develop the trust in me. Educators' self-esteem has also improved, as they learnt to do subject analysis that finally assisted them to identify gaps that if closed, would mean that the learners begin to perform. Knowing that my contribution was acknowledged and appreciated by all stakeholders inspired me to come up with new ideas. Working with those who are not afraid to fail, also assisted me in continuously being innovative. I only discovered that involving all stakeholders in the school's activities might finally benefit the school after I invited health practitioners and business people to attend the memorial service, Heritage Day celebration, and prayer day, where I finally awarded educators, learners and support staff for their different good deeds. At the next event, I requested donations for a Grade 12 motivational day at a hall 12 km from the school, taxi owners provided 11 taxis for free, and from the neighbouring hospital and one medical centre, they send motivational speakers for free. In this way it can be seen that working with and for people does assist significantly in the effective management and leading of the school. Parents also makes sure that their children are at school, on time and very neat, and that they do what they are required to do. Working with and involving the community in school activities is the best strategy for getting donations.

When the community knows that you indeed care for and respect them, in turn, they respect you, and if there is a project you need to run, you are able to be sure of their support. I have earned the respect and trust from all stakeholders. Even the Deputy Principal and his acolytes respected and trusted me, though they may not be able to acknowledge it. When Mr Zitha was in debt, and his house was auctioned, he came to me for assistance instead of going to his acolytes. After I assisted him, I felt good.



## 4.5. OTHER CHALLENGES

### 4.5.1. Struggling to Balance Family and Work

Being a wife and a mother of three, the principal of a well-renowned secondary school, a university student, and a traditional health practitioner all at once, was really challenging. I had to spend most of my time at school, in order to be able to sustain the school's status; that of a performing school. As a police officer, my husband worked shifts. When he was not on duty, I was forced to be home earlier, which is at around 17h00, so that I might get some sleep before he comes back from the liquor store, drunk, and ready to speak the whole night. If I decided not to speak to him, he one way or another would find a way to provoke me until I engaged him in discussion. In most instances, he would say "the fact that you earn more than I do doesn't mean that you are the boss of this house." His inferiority complex was deeply ingrained. Not having enough sleep at night because of a jealous husband, and waking up early in the morning to deal with uncooperative educators is not for the faint-hearted. My husband complained about anything and everything. He was never satisfied. When he found me studying, he commented, "I'm sure you are a professor now. You have been studying since the day I met you. Don't you finish?" In most cases, I would not respond, realising that it is the complex and liquor that is speaking. He will then tell me that qualifications are not the man of the house, saying "the fact that you are highly qualified means nothing in this house."

When I would go to the university to either attend or to meet my supervisors, he alleged that I was cheating on him. Initially I was tempted to bring him along to the university so that he might witness the situation, but on second thoughts, I decided otherwise. As a traditional health practitioner, sick people come, and I take them to my consulting room. In such case that I was attending to a male patient, my husband would come regularly to check on us, pretending he was in need of something. In such case that someone was very sick, and I left the school to attend to the patient, immediately when I wanted to go back to school, my husband would either take my car keys, or just say what would annoy me. He used to say, "I'm treated as an ordinary person here. If others need you, you help them without hesitating." My husband wanted me home by 15h00, because he sees other educators leaving school from 14h00. He didn't perceive the need for me to knock off late. Mtzerere Secondary runs daily, where there are no weekends or holidays for learners.

Learners are so motivated that they are always there, and as a principal, I cannot shy away from my responsibilities. From August until the last day of final examination each year, certain learners sleep over there. They need require my support. Sometimes I go home, take a bath and a nap, then go back to school, despite all the troubles I have at home. When I'm in my office, learners behave well in class because I have a list of which learners are in each class, to hold them to account should anything go wrong. It is during that time when I pursue my own study, without any disturbances. I managed to complete my Master's degree studying while supervising learners at night, during weekends, or on holidays.

From 2011, when I got my Master's degree, my husband decided not to spend even a single cent at home, claiming that he earned peanuts compared to his wife, who was "the most qualified person imaginable, and the principal of a prominent school". I thus took care of every household cost except for the bond, which was paid through his debit order. In 2012, our last-born became pregnant at age seventeen, and my husband blamed me. I had no choice but to remind him of us having our first born when I was seventeen too. He knew that my mother wasn't aware that I was having an affair. My husband then used that opportunity to leave us, go back to his home, until I divorced him in 2015. With him not at home, I think I'm better and discharging my responsibilities without any interference. I had no problem taking care of my children on my own.

#### **4.5.2. Cultural Issues**

At school, cultural issues became more exposed over time, because I happened to be in a different cultural background. I am a Tsonga-speaking person, from a place about 15 km away from the school, which is situated in a Pedi-speaking area. Besides being a Tsonga woman, I am a traditional health practitioner, who comes from a family that has many traditional health practitioners. Initially, I didn't view this as a problem, up until one day, when one SMT member commented in our SMT meeting that the top management delayed the school's progress. When I wanted to know why he thought so, the other one said: "don't you know that the Deputy Principal says you bewitched us into agreeing with everything you say? We are called *Mathwasane*." *Mathwasane* are those people who are training to be traditional health practitioners known as *sangomas*. I laughed, and asked them if they believed him, and they said they don't believe him and it doesn't bother them being called *Mathwasane*. Unfortunately, in order to hurt me, the Deputy Principal expediently associates traditional healing with witchcraft.

Mr Zungu was said to be a senior *Lethwasane* or *sangoma*. He was happy about it, and boasted about being appointed as a principal of a secondary school in another circuit. When we celebrated his promotion, in his speech, he said: “guys, work with this woman, allow her to train you as a *Lethwasane* and you will be like me. I know a lot of things; I believe I can even lead the university. Be *Mathwasane* guys. You are not going to regret it.” Members of the SMT were threatened that they might die if they worked or ate with me, by the Deputy Principal. At first, it was difficult for them to come to the office, even after I wanted them to come, because they were warned not to associate with me, lest I come to bewitch them. This continued for about a year, until one of them betrayed the Deputy Principal’s confidence, saying that he had told people, “*Tsǎ etwa ke ye tshadi-pele di wela ka lengope*” (when you allow a woman to lead you, you are bound to fall into a valley).

Initially he convinced other educators at the school to avoid disciplining learners. And this, according to my own interpretations, is because he knew that without learner discipline, a school is likely to fail. Some educators especially males followed suit. I used the assembly to discipline learners and finally discipline didn’t become an issue.

#### **4.5.3. Factions within the School**

This became clear in June 2012, when we were to elect the new SGB. People were mobilised to stand for elections, with the sole purpose of pulling me down as the principal. When that came to the ears of the group that had formed against the Deputy Principal’s acolytes, they also put together their candidates. One educator heard about these respective line ups, and let me know about this in advance of the meeting. This was advantageous, because I went to the meeting knowing what to expect, regardless of the outcome of the election itself. Many of my own contributions to the meeting were not appreciated by the Deputy Principal’s acolytes, and it was clear that this politics was guiding the various responses of individuals attending the meeting. For example, I requested the SGB to allow us to buy plants and flowers, so that we might decorate the front facade of the school. Some educators and learners assisted me in designing the garden and planting one afternoon. The following day, it was said all over that the school had been changed into Zunani (my place of birth; not real name), and that there is no more difference between an educator and a gardener. I couldn’t understand why they associated decorating the school with Zunani, because in fact, the area with green plants and lawns is the place where the school is situated, not, indeed, where I come from.

I took it they did that deliberately, just to spite me, and to discourage educators who were assisting me to plant. Plants seem only to add character to an environment, rather than to detract from it. The very same educators who were against our gardening, and who spoke badly about the lawn and plants, were those who spent most of their time, especially during marking time, in that area. As the years goes by, I have learnt that factions in the school will not come to an end, because of the political organisations to which people have allegiance. All the educators at the school are African National Congress (ANC) and SADTU members, but there are cliques between them. They are divided into two groups that belong to one organisation based on who is elected at the provincial level. In all the meetings, the two groups competed on how much knowledge they possess, especially on labour-related matters. Mr Kwena, the branch chairperson, remarked one day immediately after celebrating Heritage Day. He said:

*Honestly speaking ma'am, we did not feel good about being led by a woman principal. We had mixed feelings about it, though we were uncomfortable with the acting principal, who had his acolytes. I also had my own 'people', as the chairperson of SADTU in this branch. I now realise we nearly lost a person who spirited most of our educators. Please do not pay any attention to those who think they can undermine you.*

Mr Kwena further asserted that, before the Deputy Principal's delegation to act as a principal, he said in a site meeting that they cannot be ruled by a PEU principal, and this restored resentments from the deputy's supporters. The cracks deepened, as the Deputy Principal continued to divide the educators in the name of canvassing for the post in advance of the day it might be advertised. He further remarked: "educator factions made things difficult in the beginning, as most of departmental policies were not followed, because another group would not do that which is done by their rivals no matter how correct it was." The implementation of signing time off registers and filling in of leave of absence forms met with a certain arrogance from educators, because they didn't want to be led by what they noted to be 'a divisive' principal. I then prepared presentations on time off, and leave measures. I organised a full day school-based workshop, with catering.

Copies were made so that they knew and understood these as policy matters requiring adherence. This made the implementation of such policies easier, though complaints

continued from the Deputy Principal's acolytes. There were many other challenges I was required to face. Dealing with the issue of my husband's sense of inferiority, and having to cope with his verbal abuse was too much for me, and as mentioned, I finally decided on divorce. This was not easy for me, taking into consideration how our children might experience it. But they were supportive, and this reassured me in my course of action. At school, knowing that my supporters were given the moniker "*Mathwasane*" meaning that they trainee traditional health practitioners (*sangomas*) by way of discouragement, I chose in an SMT meeting to refer to myself as "*Gobela*" the trainer of traditional health practitioners, in a show of appreciation for their support. This made them all laugh, and made clear that I knew of what was at stake for them in supporting me.

I further displayed the respect that I had for my supporters by saluting all those who call those educators *Mathwasane*, because they have realised and appreciate my ability to turn people into achievers, since this is what I do as a traditional health practitioner with other trainee practitioners. I teach them an African way of working with people and at the same time healing different diseases using herbs and shrubs raw, as they come from the ground. Respect, love, care and integrity is our priority; that's what my mother had always said, as she was training me and others in the art of traditional healing. I encouraged the SMT to see me as someone who could change them into the best possible curricular managers, so that we together might take the school to its highest possible level. Mr Zungu supported me by saying: "if, when bewitched, we can work in collaboration, I think we must allow witchcraft into our school so that we produce best grades." Like in other situations, I was able to transform a potentially hurtful matter into a progressive lesson.

For educators to know that I know they are called *Mathwasane*, I one day found them discussing something that happened in another secondary school, where learners demands that half the staff be removed because they are not doing their work. I jokingly said, "unless their principal becomes a *Gobela* and them *Mathwasane*, learners will chase them away because they do as they wish. "*Mathwasane* always do what their leader wants them to do", I said. Some were shocked at my words, others laughed, asking me how I happened to know that. I told them to go and take care of learners in classes, knowing that I would be happy to treat them as if *Mathwasane*, so that the school can be taken to higher heights.

Educators supporting my innovations in the garden were name-called, and yet they simply invited their detractors to come and see the results of their labour. Although I was not sure why they referred to our efforts as Zunani, I just said if Zunani was this beautiful, I wouldn't have left the place to stay in town. This illustrates the way in which I usually take challenging issues and turn them into jokes in order to continue. It's not easy to hurt me because I learnt that some people enjoy seeing others take offense. I hate giving people that pleasure, that's why I believe in relaxing and engaging in serious thoughts before taking any action. I avoid being caught between competing factions, where, in Mtzerere Secondary School, I had been there a long time before my appointment, and seemed not to be nearing the end, as it appears much of the impediments are political.

Mine is to ensure that we all understand the reasons for us to be at school, namely, that we prioritise teaching and learning. When factions and conflicts seem to be rife and affect teaching and learning, I call a briefing, and remind everyone of our main purpose in being there, namely making sure that learners are taught and produce the best results, which has indeed been the case.

## **4.6. ADVERSARIAL LESSONS**

### **4.6.1. Men Attempting to take Control**

One Friday morning, Mr Zitha, an English teacher, burst into my office while I was still having a conversation with a Grade 12 learner, who has been absent for three days that week. He immediately apologised and requested to see me as a matter of urgency. I told him to give us five minutes to finalise our meeting. Mr Zitha is the Deputy Principal's right-hand man. He then started outlining his intentions and visions of taking the school, and my leadership, to higher levels. He finally requested me to allow him to share freely with him, and to call him my Chief Operating Officer (COO), as he intended to assist in the whole school management, where, with his help, everyone would come to do what might be expected of them. I didn't hesitate telling him that there is no COO in the education's organogram, and thanked him for his initiatives, but the position he wants to occupy is the Deputy Principal's. I thought we ended the matter on a good note, until our briefing next Monday. Mr Zitha raised his hand after I had finished communicating what I had to that day.

He told everyone how badly the school is managed, and that if they were not going to intervene, the school would soon become a point of shame. Everyone was amazed, and didn't understand the reasons behind his statement, more so because it was not in the meeting, but in a briefing, where I only give information unilaterally. I had to rescue the situation by telling them that though they look surprised, I was not, relating the contents of our meeting the previous Friday to the group assembled there. Full of anger, he left the office, and I released educators for their classes. At the next parents meeting, Mr Zitha, in assistance of the Deputy Principal and his acolytes', had organised some ANC members pretending to be parents of learners in the school. To make things worse, Mr Zitha wore an ANC t-shirt, together with those people who were delivered to the school in an SMT member's personal truck. It became clear that the meeting was not going to be the kind of meeting we were used to holding.

The first three items on the agenda went well, but this ended when we turned to matters arising from the previous minutes. Mr Zitha's group wanted to reverse parents' agreement of supplementing the school fund. When parents tried to reiterate their agreement, Mr Zungu stood up and proceeded to tell them how the ANC-led government is trying to assist poor parents in allocating funds for each child in the school. Hands were clapped and the meeting was adjourned.

#### **4.6.2. Truths Revealed**

Our circuit received a trophy as the best performing circuit in the Province for 2013. As the chairperson of the Circuit Task Team (CTT) from 2011 to date, I organise and lead Grade 12 clinics, extra classes and camps. All these activities assisted us in performing well as a circuit, and I received a trophy as the best improved circuit in 2013. My Circuit Manager had already started realising that I had good intentions for Mtzerere Secondary School, as well as the circuit at large. In clinics, educators of a certain subject are called to a common venue, and identify areas of challenge in that subject, based on item analysis. As they identify challenges, the best-performing educators are identified according to their learners' performance in sections of a given subject. During these clinics, all Grade 12 learners assemble at a common venue and different educators teach different sections of a given subject.



In 2014, the Circuit Manager bypassed me and organised Circuit Awards, giving ceremony herself. An interim committee was elected, and we were informed that the celebration would be a special project. This surprised everyone, since my educators as well as principals of other schools were aware about the conflict between her and myself. Her opportunity had come to cause difficulty for me, since the school's performance had dropped that year. She elected herself the chairperson of the day, and in addressing those assembled. When presenting the school that obtained position one that year, she said:

*Let me tell you, it doesn't matter that you're highly qualified, with Master's degree or doctoral degree, no one cares about that; if you do not pass learners, just know that people are not interested in your qualifications. The 'man of the moment' is very humble, always in class and produces a 100% pass rate. I salute him. Well done. The trophy goes to none other than Hanyane Secondary School.*

Many people were surprised by her statements, as she was the one who knew all our respective qualifications, so it appeared as if she was speaking in a coded way. I had 190 matriculants that year, and passed 129 (68%) with 54 bachelors, as compared to the principal awarded as the best principal who had 16 matriculants who all passed with Higher Certificates. Things became worse and the subtext very clear, when I was to be presented a trophy for the best school. The interim committee agreed that Mtzerere Secondary was the best school, based on the number of subjects that received between 80 and 100%, with high number of learners obtained bachelors.

Due to the high enrolment at Mtzerere Secondary, I collected 11 certificates out of the 14 subjects we offer in Grade 12, and there was no school that could beat us when they counted bachelors. The Circuit Manager intentionally skipped that category, where it became the next-to-last category for the day. Upon realising that she skipped the category and the trophy remained on the table, waiting to be awarded to my school, the secretary of the Committee ascended the stage. She nodded her head but continued with the programme, until we closed the meeting, with the trophy remaining there. The rest of the people there began realising the battle between us at this point, and most became empathetic. The committee finally wrote us an apology letter, and send a delegate to bring the trophy to the school.



Two weeks later, I was invited by Tsakisa Secondary SMT and SGB as a guest speaker. They were celebrating their 90% results from 68% last year. My Circuit Manager was not happy about me being invited. She called me into her office, and warned me. She made allegations that Curriculum Advisors (CA) from that circuit complained to her about my involvement in their circuit. She told me not to engage in such activities any longer, but I told her that I would not go if not invited. Hidden emotions and the real reasons of our not getting along well together were revealed immediately, after I wrote a letter to her requesting time off from 11h00 to attend Tsakisa's function, where I attached the invitation from the school. She then called me and instructed me not to go to the function. When I asked if I was not entitled to time off, she didn't respond. It was at 9h00 the following day when I responded to a knock on my office door, and it was her. We greeted each other, and I could sense from her voice that she was angry. She then told me that she was there to tell me that I am not granted the permission to attend the celebration.

Asking why was being given permission, she indicated that I was neglecting my duties for the sake of other circuits, and that the Circuit Manager of our circuit was boasting about my services towards her circuit, and that this would lead to her circuit becoming the best one. I told her that her reasons were not convincing, and that I'm going, especially since I had applied for time off in the appropriate manner, and that I had already committed to attending. Things became heated when I told her that I know she does not like me since I go against her will. She lost her temper at this point, and told me that I was guilty of insubordination. Instead of me reacting otherwise, I laughed, and she broke down into tears. I told her that it was not my character to do so. If she believed that I stooped that low, then she indeed will not know and understand me. I further told her that I now understand her actions and behaviours towards me as the product of an inferiority complex. Luckily we were in the privacy of my office, where I had asked not to be disturbed. As she cooled down, we spoke and I reminded her that although she knows our qualifications, we do not know hers. The discussion went on till 11h00 when we both left the office, and I attended the function. My Circuit Manager quickly realised my ability to successfully organise anything I set my mind on. When I was elected the chairperson of principals, she did not oppose, knowing my power point presentations to be the best, and realising how I analyse results portrays a clear view of what has been done, and the way forward.

I went on to be unanimously elected as the chairperson and led the circuit to winning a trophy as the most improved circuit. Though I managed to get her a trophy of her own, she nonetheless continued a vendetta against me. She displayed her jealousy against me when she realised that people were acknowledging of my skills of motivating both learners and educators, and began inviting me to their schools and circuits. All the schools I visited for motivational purposes improved their matric results. That also didn't go well with my Circuit Manager. She finally revealed her anger in this regard in a function attended by diverse stakeholders, and everyone was shocked on her conduct. I didn't react on that day. Though I felt very bad, because our matric results had dropped that year, I was able to hide my embarrassment while she lambasted me in public. I got an idea of what the cause of our battle could be that day, which was then confirmed when I was supposed to go and motivate educators of Tsakisa Secondary School.

That was when I knew for sure that she felt inferior about my qualifications, and that she was aware of my capabilities, especially the ability to get what I intend getting, despite the challenges on my way. Capabilities are to be recognised in all appointments. As a leader, it becomes embarrassing to have to learn from your subordinates. You become humiliated when your followers are more knowledgeable. Being more qualified, my ability to operate computers, my skill in organising events, and my good interpersonal skills ultimately worked against my relationship with the Circuit Manager, despite the fact that these ought to bolster it.

#### **4.6.3. Lack of Confidentiality within the School Management Team**

Lack of confidentiality within the SMT was my greatest challenge at Mtzerere Secondary. After having an SMT meeting, members would convey the discussions to the educators. Usually we would hold SMT meetings before the staff meeting. The SMT always agreed with me in our meeting, but deny we agreed as they left the office. They would tell educators that I forced my ideas onto them, and would prepare educators to put up a stand against all the issues we were to discuss. That did not prevent me from taking initiatives or coming up with issues. Even after knowing that they had already discussed what was to be discussed in the meeting, I continued to put necessary issues on the agenda. This led to them nicknaming me 'Zille', because I was the only woman out of nine members in the SMT, and I showed an element of being determined to confront problems head-on. The SMT was even told in a staff meeting to keep quiet, as they had little to say in the management of the school.

As for knowing my nickname, instead of being angry, I took it as a compliment, because by then Helen Zille was the only woman in the male cabinet of the Democratic Alliance (DA) and they respected her very much. I took it that I was following in the footsteps of a good leader, and knew that it would not be long before I would be elevated. Initially, this lack of confidentiality among SMTs made it very difficult for HODs to moderate and monitor the progress in their subjects. Gradually, all HODs regained the trust in subject educators, and they started holding departmental meetings and agreed on pace-setters and a programme of assessments.

#### **4.6.4. Influence at its Best**

##### **4.6.4.1. Grade 9 graduation ceremony boycotts**

The activity that made the division between educators very clear was the introduction of a Grade Nine graduation ceremony in 2010. At first, even the Deputy Principal's acolytes seemed to like the idea of having graduations for Grade Nine learners, weighing the reasons behind it, such as motivating Grade Eight learners who wanted to be in Grade Nine the following year, so that they too might graduate, motivating Grade Nine learners, who know that without them getting clear promotion not being pushed or progressed to Grade 10, they will not wear those gowns. From Grade 10 to Grade 12, motivation becomes easier, as they are already used to studying hard. The issue was discussed in many meetings, SMTs, SGBs, and staff and parent meetings. The idea was supported by all educators, and the SGB made sure that we had 100 gowns and belts (academic regalia), even though the school had 300 Grade Nine learners that year. Parents contributed towards payment for those regalia, and preparations began. During a preparatory staff meeting I realised that some educators withdrew from the activity. It was a heated meeting, where no matter what other educators said, the Deputy Principal's acolytes insisted on sending a delegation to the SGB to cancel the function. The teacher component raised the matter with the SGB in their meeting. The SGB didn't accept the cancellation. Preparations went on, and the big day arrived. It was a cloudy morning on the 5th of December 2010, and a group of educators sat in front of the admin block, just opposite the gate, where they are seen by everyone who enters the school yard. Excited learners, parents and invited guests entered the gate as the function was scheduled for 08h00. Those who greeted the educators at the gate were told how divided the staff were, because of the new principal, and the ceremony to be held. Parents were discouraged to attend the function, as according to them, it was boycotted by many educators.

To those educators' surprise, all those with whom they spoke attended the function; maybe due to curiosity, as the function was the first of its kind. Across the entire circuit, graduations were done in pre-schools only, and they wanted to see what happened in secondary school. This was the first secondary school that organised such a ceremony. Educators and SGBs who supported the function, together with the committee that was formed by parents of children in Grade Nine, ensured that everything was in order before the beginning of the function.

Two Grade Eleven learners were trained to direct the programme, and the motivational speaker was an academic doctor. His unique red gown was as inspiration to educators, guests present, parents, and learners. Parents and learners were happy, and they pledged that the function should be an annual event, as it benefitted learners by encouraging them to work hard. The function closed formally around half past two (14h30).

#### 4.6.4.2. Strategic planning session

I felt it was important for us to review visions and missions such that we might own them. It was in April 2012 when I proposed the issue of having a strategic planning session and team-building session. I discussed with the SGB the importance of reviewing the vision and mission of the school, along with the issue of trying to mend relationships between educators. The SGB approved the two sessions and preparations started. I then organised strategic planning session which took three days, as we included planning together as subject educators and team-building, which took us two days. Plans started well from the SMT and staff, after which the request was sent to the SGB for funding. They organised a neutral venue in a lodge, and paid for all the educators. To my disappointment, the Deputy Principal's team didn't attend, most being HODs. Only two HODs honoured the sessions. Some SMT members came up with excuses on the eve of sessions, but we continued. After a while, they started complaining, alleging that we mismanaged school funds. However, the two sessions became effective, and yielded better results to all those who took part. With or without educators boycotting some of the activities, due to my ability to quickly realise interest in some educators, and to delegate and effectively organise activities, all the activities went ahead and were all successful. Parents require that their children are well cared for, since their children's happiness is their first priority. Knowing this, as both a mother and a principal, I took care of learners' happiness. Parents committed to a graduation party as a yearly event and pledged to financially support it.

Each year we had new educators joining the celebration. I didn't force them to join; I just involved those who were interested. The yearly graduation ceremony has been the most rewarding aspect of my life thus far. Knowing that I came up with the idea and made it happen has convinced me that I am capable, and that I don't rely on those who are negative, who restrict one's progress.

I was hurt when the SMT decided not to take part in the strategic planning session, which is the most important academic project, after I told the SGB that everyone would be there, based on which they utilised school funds to book a venue and pay for food. Initially I planned to confront them, but I thought that confronting them would have no real effect, and merely reveal that they had injured me.

#### **4.7. CONCLUSION**

The support that my family offered has made me who I am, a diligent, soft-spoken person, who knows what she wants and has a way of getting it. It doesn't matter how tricky the situation is. I'm always hands on. Even though I had or have to put an extra effort to get what I intend getting, I prevail. Moreover, I care for all stakeholders. Learners know they can count on me as the principal and a mother. Parents share with me all their frustrations, especially when it comes to issues impacting on learner conduct and performance. I collaborate well with all educators in spite of the faction they belong. To me, they are all educators, and they get what is due to them at that time and situation. I am usually dictated to by a given situation. I have an open-door policy, and they all know that my office is always open to them, be it regarding work or personal issues. I resolve conflicts in an easy way, without taking sides. They know I socialise with them equally, where it is necessary. I rely mostly on delegation. Those who are keen to do extra-curricular duties are allocated these, and supported in carrying them out. I do not compromise myself where teaching and learning is concerned.

My mother was not a forceful person, but she took it upon herself to advise me leaving a room to make final decisions. I got married against her will, and the marriage didn't work. The initial lack of support from my in-laws and my husband continued, and only increased, coupled with a sense of inferiority and jealousy. My younger brother inspired me to further my studies, which really indicated that I have been raised in a caring family.

He disregarded the fact that I was married, but looked at me as a sister, who, to him was to progress academically. Despite the fact that I struggle to balance my family and work, which led to my divorce, I finally achieved what I wanted to achieve, namely the principalship of a performing school. As a principal, a woman, a traditional health practitioner and a person working in a culture other than my own, I was threatened, intimidated, discriminated against, and called names by colleagues. In essence, they wanted to get rid of me as a principal.

I felt that I wasn't accepted, and was always afraid of being alone at school. It was like I could be attacked at any time. They didn't care about my capabilities. I felt that they didn't accept being led by a woman from another ethnic group, who is also a traditional health practitioner. They tried by all means to undermine me, they left me to orientate myself, they made it very difficult to build collegiality, they boycotted all activities I came up with, they deepened factions within the school, they attempted to control me and the school and they kept on influencing others against me. All this didn't prohibit me from being the woman and the principal I wanted to be. Despite all those challenges, I banked upon the support of those who wanted to work, and till today we have ensured that the school is still in the performing category in which I found it in, moreover, it has improved. It doesn't matter what challenges I find myself in, I do not lose focus, I know what I want, and I go for it.

## CHAPTER 5

### MRS NALO'S STORY

#### 5.1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter details the story of a secondary school woman principal, Mrs Nalo in Limpopo Province, covering her biographical data, the modelling of lessons from her mother and Mrs Naledi, and her experiences from the initiation school. According to Mrs Nalo's culture, it is compulsory for boys and girls to attend the initiation school. They are taught how to behave as adults. Girls are prepared to be real women in the sense that they will always be submissive to their in laws and to their husbands. Boys are trained to be men and are regarded as such as long as they have graduated from the initiation school, irrespective of their age.

In the subsequent sections, I categorise the data under the following leadership themes: men attempting to control Mrs Nalo's life; difficulties in balancing work and family; transition to principalship; adversarial lessons; coping mechanisms on confrontations; and lastly her ability to sustain and extend success. Mrs Nalo also spoke of her vision at Mpuru Secondary School and the strategies she uses to overcome challenges she faces or faced, and has overcome.

#### 5.2. BIOGRAPHY

Mrs Nalo was brought up by a single mother of three children, with one sister and one brother. She was the only child educated in her family, as she was adopted by her uncle, who took care of her studies. She was the first woman principal to be appointed at Mpuru Secondary School, and had been a senior teacher, who automatically served on the School Management Team for ten years before her appointment as a principal. She was the second woman principal in that circuit. She served first as a temporary teacher under a female principal and then as a permanent teacher under a male principal. She became a principal after Mr Phenda (pseudonym) left the school on promotion. Her deputy principal acted as a principal for nine months after Mr Phenda's promotion, and had applied for the position, which he unfortunately couldn't win. Mrs Nalo is a divorcee and has four children, two boys and two girls. She was staying with her in-laws before principalship, and then immediately relocated to stay with her husband at a place where he worked, 300 km from his birthplace, and 200 km from where Mrs Nalo was a principal.

Mrs Nalo bought them a house, and subsequently had to buy a car so that she would be able to go home monthly, as she was the one working far from their home.

### 5.3. MODELING LESSON

#### 5.3.1. The Most Influential Person in her Life

Mrs Nalo is the second born of the three children. They have been raised by a single mother and depended much on her uncle for schooling. She is the only educated member of her family and she is not proud of her family background, because of the poverty that she was raised in, first without a father, and then being taken care of by an uncle and aunt. Despite all the challenges she faced at that time, Mrs Nalo is very proud of her mother. She asserted: “my mother, uh ... just raised us alone, she was a single parent. But I’m proud of her, you know. She did a good, err ... a good work.” Mrs Nalo thinks she inherited her strong character from her mother. She describes her mother as follows:

*My mom is this type of, er ... a woman who is very strong. When she takes decisions she doesn't hesitate. When she says 'one is one', it will never change, even if she is wrong. She would tell you; 'that's my word and my word is final.' She sticks to it, and I believe that thing it's in me. I do stick to my word, especially if it's a policy matter. [sic]*

According to what Mrs Nalo said, it prevailed she had developed a strong character to withstand anything, due to the fact that her mother, as her role model, is a very strong person. Her mother always told her children to fight back and not come back and report that they have been beaten by people somewhere, especially women. Even if a man or a boy beat one of her children, she doesn't want to know reasons for the disagreement that led to that fight, she fights back. She asserted:

*When somebody beats you outside, you must not come back and tell her [mother] somebody's beating you; you must fight for yourself. And when you come back, you would rather say I was beaten by a boy, she would stand up and fight for you. But when it's a girl, she'll say; what's the difference between you and her? She doesn't even look at the age. Ha ... ha ... ha ... [Laughs] [sic]*



Her mother's message was clear; no one ought to make you cry, especially women, and if any male attacks one of her children, she encouraged them to protect each other by ganging up against the perpetrator. In such cases, Mrs Nalo's brother, the only son, was expected to take the forefront as the man of the house. Mrs Nalo's mother believed in the use of tactics in approaching different issues. She asserted: "my mother sometimes concludes her lecture as we used to call her speech by saying: "it's not the age that beats; it's the tactics that you use." Mrs Nalo learned to stand for herself, in all situations, from her mother. In addition to not crying, but fighting back, especially if it's a woman, she taught them to be tactful in approaching any life situation. Having strategies by means of which to deal with issues was something Mrs Nalo inherited from her mother, who was not educated, but had life knowledge nonetheless, and was capable of resolving issues her own way. Her mother is the source of Mrs Nalo's earliest and strongest lessons in life, and leadership lessons that still influence her today. So it tells us that it is not an education system that makes us survive in life, but the strategy we adopt for living. Mrs Nalo's ability to plan for everything makes her successful in managing and leading the school, and this she learnt from her mother.

### **5.3.2. Role Models, Sponsors and Networking**

According to Ely et al. (2011) people learn new roles by identifying with role models. According to Pirouznia (2006), several studies have revealed that female role models in higher administrative positions act as an important influence in terms of career aspirations for other women. Pirouznia further indicated one African American female principal who viewed the lack of role models in women as a barrier to female principalship, and regarded those who had such role models as the lucky ones. Mrs Nalo was one of those lucky women, because she looked up to a local woman principal, the only woman principal (Naledi) in the circuit, who was doing so well in the management and leadership of that school. Mrs Nalo viewed Naledi, (her former woman principal) as the other person who professionally influenced her not to set limits on what she wanted to do. She was a married woman with three children, a school principal, and still furthering her studies in the same university where Mrs Nalo registered for BA. Another person whom Mrs Nalo admired was her uncle's wife (aunt), who was a nurse, and who inspired her to become a nurse herself, though she finally became a teacher.

Findings by Morojele et al. (2013), Pande and Ford (2011), Sperandio and Kagoda (2009), Smith (2008) and (Shakeshaft et al., 2007) concur that women do not receive the mentoring,

sponsorship or networking their male counterparts have. Shakeshaft et al. (2007) argue that women have been marginalised from networking because the process of belonging is highly exclusive and male-dominated. The lack of networking impedes a woman's progression, because she lacks the encouragement and connection needed to gain access to senior positions (Sperandio and Kagoda 2009 & Smith, 2008). However, though patterns of communication and socialisation are often almost exclusively male (Pirouznia, 2006), where Mrs Nalo had the chance to associate with more senior managers from different departments as a member of Black Management Forum (BMF), which deals with promotion of the development and the empowerment of managerial leadership amongst black people within organisations. Mrs Nalo asserted, "immediately I joined that forum, madam, I became a changed person." The BMF engages its members on regular branch networking forums with renowned and topical speakers, annual conference breakfast dinners and annual achievements celebrations. Though she joined BMF after attaining principalship, to Mrs Nalo, the knowledge she acquired from networking in the BMF makes her a better manager and leader. Because of her skill to network, she also works well with parents. When she invites them to school for their children's performance review, they all come, and she views such meetings as important for the improvement of learner performance.

### **5.3.3. Experiences in Initiation School**

In addition to the lesson she learnt from her mother, that no woman should make her cry, the trainers or elders in the initiation school ill-treated them (the initiates) in order to make them strong. According to her view, her mother was preparing her to cope with what was to happen in the initiation school early in her life. In Limpopo, as in other provinces such as Mpumalanga and KwaZulu-Natal, initiation schools are still deemed very important, especially for males. The difference here is that in the area where Mrs Nalo was born and bred, women are compelled to go to initiation schools because it is used as a yardstick or a license for marriage. If not initiated and married, you are lucky. She asserted:

*If you don't go to the initiation school, you feel like you don't belong to the society; it will be hard for you to get married. Men always view you as someone who is not disciplined and will not be accepted by their families, who believe and expect that their children should marry women who are initiated because they come back being a submissive and polite. [sic]*

Mrs Nalo used her insight into the paradigms of initiation school as an advantage and the strategy to deal with those exploiting patriarchy. She looked at the educators at Mpuru Secondary School and believed that they adopted and follow what they had learned from the initiation schools. Men don't consider women, and believe them to be incompetent, which according to Mrs Nalo, might be something men inherited from their own initiation schools. Boys go to the initiation school for a month and are immediately expected to act like adult 'men' on their return. In so doing, however, they undermine all women, including their mothers, who in turn expect to become submissive, due to the training they (women) too received in their initiation schools. Women are taught to totally respect men, irrespective of age, as long as a male comes from initiation school. Mrs Nalo acknowledged:

*When they come back even if they are young, they always force to be like men and to want to be in control of everything, to be heard and dominant. Even when you are his mother, when you talk to them they'll just show that you're nothing. You, you must just hear everything, whatever they say you must just follow, you must be submissive to them [men]. [sic]*

According to Mrs Nalo, the whole ideology from the initiation school seems to have been transferred to other schools, such as Mpuru Secondary School. Men want to be heard, and women are expected to take the back seat. If by chance, or by luck, a woman becomes a leader, everything is done to make her fail in leadership. Many women principals encounter gender stereotyping and sexism (Lindo, 2012; Damons, 2008). Despite other innovative advances in the South African education system, gender stereotypes and the insubordination of women seems to continue to pose a challenge, which shows that women are faced with unequal conditions as administrators (Morojele et al. 2013), in addition to Mrs Nalo's view of lesson learnt from initiation schools.

Damons (2008) asserts that sex stereotyping encourages sex attitudes that put women in an unfavourable position, where men perceive themselves as having an upper hand over women's work. Many of the women in Lindo (2012)' study spoke of the frustration of not being heard as leaders. According to Lindo's findings, men are reluctant accepting women as leaders, which in her opinion, speaks to male privilege, where both genders have been socialised to respond to men as leaders so women have to work harder to get those they lead to respond to them.

#### 5.3.4. The Impact of Initiation School

Mrs Nalo believes that her being initiated assisted her in becoming the strong leader and manager that she considers herself to be. Mrs Nalo believed that the ill-treatment they got as initiates was meant to train them to be women who can stand for anything, especially adverse situations in their families. They are, in addition, trained to be submissive women, who know that their place is in the kitchen, with children, and that ‘a man is a man and no woman should question him’. Mrs Nalo explains:

*To me, madam, it was different. I think there is something different about me. It's like uhm ... when I look at things I go deeper. I get deeper, and say, but why, but what is it that I gained from the initiation school? To me it was, yes, it helped me; respect it's always there, but I can't stand for somebody; man or woman to play with me like I'm a tennis-ball, uh ... I'll put it that way. [sic]*

However, life in the initiation school was unbearable as Mrs Nalo claimed:

*Those elder girls who were supposed to take care of us will time and again ill-treat us; sometimes they beat us, sometimes they say some hurting stuff to us, you know, when you're weak you'll cry. But I told myself that they will never see a drop of my tears. I said, no, no, no, I won't stand a situation whereby another woman will make me cry. I always visualized my mother. [sic]*

She learnt the courage from her mother who always discouraged them to come home crying, saying they were beaten by others at the streets, or wherever they had just come from. She told them to always fight back, though that was not allowed at the initiation school.

You respect an elder no matter what he or she does or says to you. But she learned to stand up for herself. She remarked: “it doesn't matter how you come, how you provoke me, whatever, I use the tact that my mom taught me.” When I asked her to give an example of tactics she uses in difficult situations at school level, she spoke of the time when Mpuru Secondary was given three ad hoc posts instead of two. Her circuit manager quickly picked that up, and requested her to give one post to the school that was in need within the circuit. She informed the SGB and the SMT, who seemed not to have problems with that. Before she could inform the staff, the deputy principal had already told and influenced some educators to

attack her, because according to him, she sold their post, such that they become overloaded. The meeting became heated, in such a way that she was obliged to stop chairing. But to her surprise, the deputy, unrequested, chaired the meeting further, remarking: “I believe, madam will not feel offended if we tell her to go and call her Circuit Manager and tell her to bring our post back.” They started speaking randomly while she kept quiet. When they cooled down and seemed satisfied to have attacked her, she stood up and said: “I understand your concerns”, but even before she could finish her statement, Mrs Ntolwane said: “tell the circuit manager to come here with her high heels and her, and her two pieces.” Mrs Nalo felt offended about the educator’s behaviour, disrespect and insubordination. She responded:

*I understand your concern, but my policy tells me that, as the principal, I’m the one responsible for subject allocation. So when you say I have to come to you, and tell you before I take decision. There are issues that you can take decisions, or you can be part in taking decisions, but there are issues that need the principal, and the principal alone, and I am that principal here. [sic]*

Remember, Mrs Nalo agreed to have emulated this bold character from her mother and that woman principal of a primary school in the village of her in-laws (Naledi). This time she wants her deputy to call the Circuit Manger, inform her to bring back their ad hoc post. She is well aware that he was the one who influenced the staff and wanted to prove that he was a coward.

## **5.4. MEN ATTEMPTING TO CONTROL MRS NALO’S LIFE**

### **5.4.1. Her Uncle**

When she was doing matric, her uncle asked her where she wanted to study after matric. She indicated her interest in nursing as she admired her aunt (the uncle’s wife) in her white uniform as a nurse. She confirmed: “When I looked at her in that white dress, I said: ‘Oh, wow! One day it will be me.’” Instead of him telling her there and then that he doesn’t like the idea that she be a nurse, he wanted to know what her second choice was. She told him that she would take teaching as her second choice. After receiving her matric statement of results, her uncle disregarded her first choice and took her to an education college. According to Mrs Nalo’s assertion, parents that time in their area wouldn’t listen to what their children had to say, especially if that child was a girl. Men just want to see themselves controlling women.

She was hurt by her uncle's actions. And though she knew she was not supposed to question him, she confronted him. She stated:

“Why did you take me to the education college instead of nursing college?” In his response, he indicated that he had a problem with nursing. He asserted:

*‘You are aware that my wife is a nurse and there are things that dissatisfy me about her career. I can't leave you to do it while I know I have problems. Are you going to be married?’ I said, ‘yes’, and then he said: ‘not all men can stand nurses. They work late, sometimes during the night and they are always not at home even during holidays. With teaching, you work half a day. You'll always be ready if your husband comes back everything will be ready and in order. But With nurses, it's a different, story, as a man I am sometimes expected to cook for children, bath them and take them to bed. This is unacceptable. I don't want your husband to go through what I go through.’ [sic]*

Her uncle took her to a college for his own selfish reasons. He wanted to protect the man who was not even there. He thought of how that man, the future husband to his niece is supposed to live. Because of his style of living and his wife who was a nurse, he forced Mrs Nalo to finally accept her second choice. As a man, he wanted her prospective husband to be taken care of when he comes back from work, as if his niece would not be working. Teaching is in most cases especially in Limpopo, not taken as a career, even amongst educators themselves.

That is why many educators tend to be absent from schools, because anything that happens during the day or during the week at home is fixed or taken care by a parent educator. Going to school as an educator is not considered as going to work like going to other careers. If, for instance, the woman is working somewhere or is a nurse and the husband an educator, all family issues that need to be attended to during working hours are attended to by the husband. That is why Mrs Nalo's uncle wanted her to be an educator. Teaching is further taken as women's career so that they be able to take care of their men and children. According to Mrs Nalo's uncle, men do not prefer women who work until late. He therefore didn't want to take Mrs Nalo to a nursing college, which affirms the expectation that women are to be home early, irrespective of where and what they do for a living. Finally, Mrs Nalo took that option of going to an education college, and fortunately, she loved it. Unfortunately,

Mrs Nalo fell pregnant in her second year of study. She was then forced to get married, especially because her uncle saw her as a disappointment, and declared that he would not pay for any longer.

#### **5.4.2. The Deputy Principal**

In addition to her uncle's attempt to control her, her deputy principal proposed to her in her first month as a principal in Mpuru Secondary. According to her view, his aim was to defocus her from doing her duties as a principal, so that he might be in control of the situation, as a lover. Mrs Nalo felt disrespected by him as her subordinate, but she didn't fall into his trap as she declared: "but as a born again, as a Christian you know, it just came fast, and then I said; over my dead body." Mthembu (2007) observed how women are "unduly criticised, undermined and not taken serious by their male and female colleagues". Women are disrespected and undervalued, even after they had obtained administrative positions. So what Mrs Nalo describes as her own experience is indeed happening to other women. In her 4<sup>th</sup> year at the school, Mrs Nalo got sick, and was on leave for three months. For the first two months at home, the deputy principal showed no concern for her wellbeing; he didn't bother calling to find out how she was doing. In the third week of the third month, when there was only one week left for her to go back to work, he called. She suspected that something was not well. She answered the phone and he said:

*'Madam, how are you?' I said 'I'm okay and you?' And he said, 'I'm okay but I could hear from your voice that you are still in pain.' I said 'how can detect it from my voice that I'm still in pain? Well I'm okay; I'm coming back next week and I think you are aware.' Then he said, 'no ma'am, I think it's wise for you to extend your sick leave to regain that strength.' [sic]*

When Mrs Nalo wanted to understand why the deputy principal is saying it's wise for her to extend her leave, he said: "you know what ma'am, there is actually nothing wrong in extending the leave because you are still going to get your full salary." Mrs Nalo responded by saying that she is not after money, but worried that her work is lagging behind. She then thanked him for his advice, though doubted whether things were well at school following their conversation. In order to cut the conversation short, she told him that his concern was noted, and that she would see whether to extend or not, but she knew she is going back to school; no extension. According to Mrs Nalo's view, her deputy principal enjoyed being the



principal in her absence. His advice strengthened and made her want to be at school, even when she didn't feel well. She admitted that his *schadenfreude* was little hurtful to her.

Another thing that proved her deputy's insubordination and the fact that he wanted to either control or destroy Mrs Nalo was the Grade Nine results in her second year of arrival. At Mpuru Secondary School, they have what they call Grade Heads, due to the huge enrolment. The deputy principal was delegated head of Grade Nine, because it is an exit class and needed more attention and experience to lead; from General Education and Training (GET) to Further Education and Training (FET). He was responsible for the management and leadership of curricula and co-curriculum issues as well as learners' well-being in Grade Nine. He was required to ensure that they are regularly taught, that moderations are done, that they attend school regularly, that classes were attended by both educators and learners, that they take part in extra-mural activities, and that they receive all the support other grades receive. Knowing that she has everything well placed insofar as grades are concerned, Mrs Nalo relaxed and took close supervision to Grade 10 to 12, only to realise how wrong she was when all Grade Nine learners failed at the end of the year. Out of one hundred and twenty learners, only one qualified for progression, although not qualifying for promotion. She was the only child who got 39% in Mathematics, which requires 40% to pass.

She asserted: "the only rule for progression is when they got err ... 33%, in Maths you can give them 7% but they, didn't qualify even after they get that 7% because the highest % was 30." The worst part was that ninety five learners, who failed, had good percentages in other subjects, but for the mere fact that in Grade Nine, a learner who fails Mathematics was to be retained, they were required to repeat that grade. As she explained the situation, she said: "that was, yoh! I was even unable to face parents, to be honest." This was the most horrible situation for her. She even blamed herself as the supervisor. She asserted:

"I was in shock and blamed myself because I knew my deputy principal. Whilst still in shock, the deputy principal went on leave for two weeks, leaving her in that situation to be accountable alone. She set an appointment with the Circuit Manager, who was not happy at all about those results. Mrs Nalo pleaded with her; she apologised and really felt down. She declared: "I accepted I disappointed her, and requested her to allow me to progress those learners who failed Mathematics only. I further indicated that I know what the policy says about learners in Grade 9 failing Maths, but this was not a normal situation. I requested her to



give me a chance.” Finally the Circuit Manager agreed to meet me, and further secured a meeting with circuit appealing committee for her to state Mrs Nalo’s plea, which she did in success, though there were conditions attached.

The committee requested her to come up with the strategy that would convince them that those learners would be supported after progression. She was to submit her motivations and the strategy within twenty four hours. What she did was to immediately call parents of learners who qualified for progression. Because of their interest in what is going to happen with their children, they all came within two hours of her call. They didn’t complain as they ordinarily would. They wished for good news. Before she could outline the purpose of their gathering, she apologised for the inconvenience she caused them. She shared with them her frustrations, and requested them to come up with strategies that they are going to use to support those learners in Grade 10, should they be progressed. They agreed that they would pay in and let the principal use that fund to hire a private Mathematics educator, a good one, and indicated that they don’t want their children to be exposed to what happened that year. To emphasise their agreement, one parent said: “Uhm ... we will pay R100, 00 per child per month as a starter for eight months so that you get a good Mathematics (Maths) teacher, who will teach them after hours so that this type of a thing doesn’t repeat itself.”

Mrs Nalo was happy about the agreement, and she told parents that her thinking was to use educators present in the school to put extra effort in the teaching of Maths in Grade Nine and Ten. She said they would engage in extra lessons in Maths. Parents didn’t agree to use the same educators in the school for their plan arguing that educators were pressed for time and motivating for an external educator to treat this matter as a special case. Come the following day, she took minutes of the parents meeting and the signed roll call; she highlighted the schedule indicating learners who would progress and a typed list of those learners to the circuit. She was accompanied by Mr Movalo, a teacher representative in the SGB. She indicated that she did this deliberately, not involving the SMT, because of their previous lack of support to her. She believed they could jeopardise her efforts to get those learners to the next grade, to compromise her rapport with parents. Her meeting with the Circuit Manager and the circuit appealing committee went well. They agreed to let her progress qualifying learners to Grade 10 and for parents to trust her to utilise their extra funds was the greatest reward she expected under that situation.

### 5.4.3. Her Husband

According to Mrs Nalo, men believe they are and should be the ones that do other things except taking good care of houses, children and parents at homes. Her experience was that her husband ‘looked into her and saw a man’, and he wanted to put her back to her place, a submissive woman in the house. She stated: “sometimes he end up getting out of his mind you know, like I said, I divorced him mainly because he tried to rape our last born just to get at me, and she was thirteen years of age.” [sic] Mrs Nalo confirmed she was so surprised and saw the world as abnormal. When asked by police officers that she took home, her husband confirmed: “I wanted to hurt her.” When the whole saga started, she was at school, 200 km away from their home. She received a call from her youngest daughter, who was crying, and she just heard ‘father and my private part’, at which Mrs Nalo assumed he had raped her. She then hastened home; less than two hours’ drive. She asserted: “I was like oh! And to me it was, you know, it is done. The rape was done. But fortunately enough, he just attempted, because he wanted to put a tampon in her private part.” [sic] It was bad indeed for a man to put a tampon in her daughter’s private parts, even if it’s that time of menstruation, but she was not menstruating nor did he have her permission, according to Mrs Nalo. When Mrs Nalo was driving and nearing her home, she thought deeply of what was to be done, because if she went straight home, alone, they would certainly fight. She recounted:

*I was ready for him to kill me or I kill him. That feeling was becoming stronger but I finally, decided to go to police station first. They gave me two police officers, a male police and a female police. When I confronted him in from of the police officers, I was surprised by the reasons he was trying to give me. Even one police officer tried to confront him, he just said: “I wanted to hurt her because she feels she is a man. [sic]*

Mrs Nalo felt that she is fighting to defend her bold character. She is faced with challenges from different angles; at home and at work. Researchers such as Morojele et al. (2013), Lindo (2012), Moorosi (2007), Shakeshaft et al. (2007), Ngcobo (2006) and Paulsen (2009) assert that the relationship between family and career was seen as a difficult one for women principals who had families. Mrs Nalo viewed her character as a threat to her husband and the other male educators.

Men still see women as objects to be used by them, and as they wish even after twenty years of democracy in South Africa. Having a firm approach to decision-making by women like Mrs Nalo is a serious challenge to them. That is what led to their divorce. She felt she couldn't take it any longer, even though as a woman, sometimes she felt she wanted to be loved, but it was too much for her and from that day on she said: "over my dead body, I just have to divorce this man, and stand firm. I put my foot down and say, this can't be taken by me, Mrs Nalo, what I will say if one day he succeeds in raping one of my girls." Mrs Nalo is not afraid of taking decisions and standing by them, which she says is interpreted, when coming from a woman, as aggression. She wanted to be safe rather than sorry, by ensuring that her husband stays as far away from their children as possible. Her trust was betrayed the minute he said he wanted to hurt her.

### **5.5. DIFFICULTIES IN BALANCING WORK AND FAMILY**

Her mother-in-law, like most mothers-in-law expected her to stay home, take care of them while waiting for her husband to come home from work. She refused to take any responsibility of the first born baby boy, even though Mrs Nalo worked as a temporary teacher at a primary school in the same village they were staying. That's where she was convinced that she was a good teacher. She was teaching all the subjects in her class, including a local African language; Tsonga, with which she was not familiar. Dedicated as she was, she gave herself time to learn Tsonga so that she could teach the correct things. From being a temporary teacher, Mrs Nalo went back to the education college to complete her studies, but it was not easy for her. Attending school from a new family with a new-born baby, and a mother-in-law who was not supportive of schooling, became difficult. She indicated that her mother-in-law once said: "... according to our culture you can't go back to school. When you want to complete your school, you do it when you're at your home. Not here. When you are here, you are Makoti (daughter-in-law) and that's all."

Despite all that was said, Mrs Nalo continued with her studies, especially because at that time, she and her husband's relationship was still very strong. He convinced his mother to take care of their child, or else he was not going to maintain them anyway. After completing her studies, Mrs Nalo gave birth to their second child, this time a girl. Now she had to go and look for a nanny to take care of her new-born baby. She was employed at a secondary school offering Maths and LFSC. When I asked her how she managed to balance her secondary

school work and family with an unsupportive mother-in-law, Mrs Nalo explained how difficult it was for her. She commented: “Uhm ... working and coming late was not what is expected in my family because they thought I was cheating their son.” [sic] She tried to give them reasons as to why she had to come home late, but their minds were made up that she was having an extra-marital affair. When speaking with all of the women principals about their current family situations, Wrushen and Sherman (2008) indicated that they repeatedly heard stories about the struggle to balance family and work. Some principals shared feelings of uncertainty on the part of them having children. One principal in another study likewise remarked:

*It's tough, because we've been thinking about the children thing for a while, and we want to do it. I just don't know how to do it. I don't know how to do it! And, you know, it's funny... when I was teaching and had different principal mentors and so forth, they were all divorced women! So, when I took this job on, I said, 'Honey, this just puts us closer to divorce rate!' (cited in Wrushen & Sherman, 2008: 11).*

No matter what her husband's family said or did, Mrs Nalo continued to remain at work and make sure that she got ready for work the following day. She didn't pay attention to them. Throwing oil on fire, Mrs Nalo registered Bachelor of Arts degree (BA) under those circumstances, which made her to come home after midnight. She used a common means of transport with other educators in their village, who had registered for evening classes.

They left the area at 15h00 and lessons resumed at 17h00 Monday to Friday. Another motivator was the woman principal of a primary school with whom she worked, who was also attending those evening classes doing Bachelor of Honours (B.Ed.) at that time. Her housekeeper was taking the baby with her to her home when she knocked off at five, and Mrs Nalo took her (the child) every night when coming back, because her mother-in-law wanted her to feel guilty for leaving the child until late midnight. She had the courage of defying what her in-laws expected of her. Despite her not being allowed to come home late, she remained at school, doing her lesson preparations and even registering for BA, and finally arriving home midnight. The mother-in-law was not supportive at all, as Mrs Nalo asserted: “so the human relations at home were really odd. The only time that I felt better was when my husband was back, and that was only one weekend per month.” He worked about 300 km from where they stayed in Limpopo Province. According to Mrs Nalo, her mother-in-law

seemed to respect her son very much, but she viewed the respect as being related to the care that they got from him.

When he is home, his mother bathes both their children and she looks happy and expects her son to buy everything that is needed in the house and give her some pocket money to save for any emergency issues. The family takes another shape when he is home. As soon as he leaves them, the sour relationship between his wife and mother continued. Mrs Nalo found it very difficult to perform her duties as a principal now, with four children, and an unsupportive husband. She was not even sure as to how she managed to raise her children and produce good results as a principal. Mrs Nalo thinks working away from home might have assisted her to be where she is, because she is able to stay at school most of the time. However, she feels guilty for not being able to raise her kids the ‘right way’, as she called it. She confirmed: “I was not there for them, because I immediately went to this post when they were still young. They just grew on their own with this father, who was very bully, until I ended up divorcing him after he attempted to rape our last born.” [sic] When I disclosed my own marriage status that I am also a divorcee, we laughed and she said:

*It seems like women principals must be divorcees, though it gives us a clue that men are unable to stand the promotion of their own women. They take it as a challenge. So those that are leaders and still get support from their spouses are lucky. And I even thought I can even quit the job. There are those days that you are weak you know, you end up saying: I think I have to quit the job because this man ended up not working. [sic]*

My disclosure to her about my marriage status made her feel more comfortable telling her story. She then concluded that it seems men are unable to cope with women holding higher positions, based on the situation I described to her, where my husband decided to go back to his home after I obtained my M.Ed. in addition to being the principal of a well-known secondary school.

He felt inferior, such that every minute, he referred to me as wanting to be the man of the house, because I earned more than he did. Time and again, he would undermine me with reference to my role at school not extending to the household. As both divorcees, we were both married in community of property, but our difference was that my husband is a police

officer and hers is unemployed. When she thinks of him getting half of everything she possess, she first took a deep breath and said: “I even considered quitting the job so that I get my pension funds before they accumulate than to share them with him at a later stage when they have accumulated.” [sic] She wanted to leave the work, get her monies and join a new department, because she heard that if one resigns the spouse is not involved in the spouse’s payments. She was really afraid of finally him getting fifty percent of her pension funds and all her belongings, whilst he has nothing to offer. They owned a bond house registered in her name, and she was liable for payment. She also had a car, which she bought two years after her appointment as a principal, and she was taking care of all the four children’s school funds, clothing, food and medical expenses. The thought of sharing her pension funds with him was traumatising for her.

Mrs Nalo didn’t further her studies after her appointment as a principal, because of challenges she faced at home and at school, including financial constraints. After her promotion she relocated to where her husband worked, took out a bond, and relocated all her children to stay there. That was when things were still good, and she felt better in his presence than amongst his mother and siblings.

She initially thought it was a relief, until things started to be bad at home, as she indicated: “Um ... I didn’t get support from my husband. It was like he was jealousy and he started you know, er ... insulting and beating me up.” [sic] She felt that he was jealous and had an inferiority complex, especially since he was not educated and she was the one paying for the house. He was not comfortable with her as a principal. She acknowledged:

*He alleged that I got the post because I was a woman and had an affair with somebody who has given me the post. And even when I tried to explain that I don’t even know anyone that side, then to him it wasn’t true at all. And then he started insulting me saying: ‘Don’t think that when you are educated then you are better than me.’ He started cheating and I felt down and disrespected. As if it was not enough, my deputy and his crew also gave me tough time at work. They always make sure that whatever I do or come up with is negated. [sic]*

The men in her professional life (deputy) and personal life (husband) acted out their jealousies in the worst ways possible. It was the inferiority complex that really drove her

husband to do all what he was doing, but in the case of the deputy principal, he wanted the post for himself and couldn't handle the fact of being led by a woman. However, the courage that she saw and emulated from the woman principal in a primary school and the lessons she learned from her mother, kept her going. Furthering her studies under those circumstances was not easy for her.

She felt she would be throwing her money away, because she couldn't make it. Another challenge that she had was that, financially, she couldn't afford paying for her B.Ed because she had to take care of their kids; paying for their studies, food, clothing, the house bond and the car instalment, because her husband quit his job immediately after she gained promotion. According to her, he claimed: "You have got money, you'll do everything. You are the man of this house now. So you are going to take care of me and kids, everything, because you go around looking for the promotions using your body." [sic]

## **5.6. TRANSITION TO PRINCIPALSHIP**

### **5.6.1. Promotion to Senior Teacher**

Mrs Nalo was promoted to senior teacher in her third year of teaching. She was the last in educator at the school and the youngest senior teacher. Being a senior teacher she automatically joined the SMT. Her promotion raised other educator's eyebrows. They started complaining and wanted to know reasons behind her promotion. Mrs Nalo was naïve at the time and unaware of reasons behind her promotion, the implications the promotion had on her payment, and the extra responsibilities as a member of the SMT. After noticing that some educators were becoming dissatisfied about Mrs Nalo's promotion, her male HOD convened a meeting, wherein he outlined the reasons for her promotion. He indicated her good classroom management and organisational skills as the main reasons for her promotion. Her classroom was always neat and well organised, and her learners performed well. She was innovative too. She introduced monthly schedules for her classes, and ensured that all her learners participated in sports by letting them compete among themselves in different sporting codes. She also made it a norm that her learners communicated in English as a way of studying the language. All along, Mrs Nalo was not aware that someone, especially her HOD was watching at her, and noticing her independence. She asserted: "so, I didn't know that when I was doing those activities someone was watching at me. That is why I got promoted, because I am the kind of a woman who works without looking at somebody who



was to, to tell me you have to do this you have to do that.” [sic] She worked as an SMT member for ten years in Maths and Sciences team. She oversaw lesson preparation, visited educators in their classes, moderated formal tasks and tests, led the drawing and monitored subjects’ policies, ensured that contact time is protected by both educators and learners, managed and led curriculum by ensuring that curriculum is covered by all educators, and monitored learners’ written work.

### **5.6.2. Building Confidence**

Her inclusion in the SMT and her being requested by the principal to do administrative duties grew her capacities to become principal. She didn’t hesitate applying for principalship when posts were advertised. In Moorosi’s view (2010), this assistantship became an indirect form of preparation long before women applied for principalship.

It is therefore evident that in addition to being a confidence booster, exposure to management made Mrs Nalo noticeable candidate for the principalship, even in areas where women principals of secondary schools have not been seen before. Another aspect that encouraged her to apply for principalship was Mrs Naledi, that principal of a primary school in their village. She used to look at Mrs Naledi and told herself, “uhm ... one day; I want to see myself as the principal.” Mrs Nalo believed in herself. Immediately after posting her application forms, she started doing research on the type of questions usually asked for principal posts. Working for ten years as an HOD and the support that she got from her principal who regularly cajoled her into doing extra administrative duties, made her believe that she would qualify for the job, and she wanted to be ready if and when she might be invited for interviews. She was indeed called and informed about being placed on the shortlist, and she continued doing her final preparations. Her principal believed in her potential to lead because he could see her hard work and dedication. He encouraged her by saying: “you can do it.” He in addition to going out of his way to motivate her, requested two other principals in their circuit who were trusted by School Governing Bodies (SGBs) in interviewing and recommending best principals locally, to guide Mrs Nalo on questions to expect and how to approach them. They indeed assisted Mrs Nalo in her preparations.

Just a day before the interviews, Mrs Nalo fell and got a fracture on her right hand, and she had to be operated on. Fortunately it was not that bad, but a plaster cast was put on that operated hand, and she showed me the scars that remained from her injury on the wrist. With



that plaster, Mrs Nalo was worry-stricken, because that was her final preparatory day. She was undeterred, however, and she asked her brother to drive her to Mpuru Secondary School for interviews.

### 5.6.3. Interview Day

Mrs Nalo was ready to be interviewed. Upon her arrival, she found three candidates to make four; two men, and two women. As they were speaking amongst themselves, Mrs Nalo realised that she was the only person who was not a local candidate. The three knew each other so well and they used their language to communicate, which though she was able to understand, she could hardly join in speaking it. That didn't distract her from her goal there, especially that she immediately thought that they are going to use English as a medium of instruction to interview them. The three candidates continued to remind each other about different interviews they attended, and incidences that led to them not being appointed.

She then reflected: "if they didn't win then, it means I'm going to beat them now. They further talked about the different types of questions asked, and then I said [to myself]: they don't know that they are training me. Remember, it was my first interview." [sic] Though she felt confident, her injury made her uncomfortable. Immediately after entering the interview room, she thought she had to make a plan and break the ice, so that they don't ask her about what happened or make their own conclusions. She then immediately after entering the room and after they greeted her while she was still waiting to be given a seat, remarked:

"I'm sorry, don't be surprised, uhm ... I'm not carrying a gun, this is just a mere fracture. Everybody laughed." [sic] Having broken the ice, Mrs Nalo was relieved and took her seat. She felt this moment of humour helped them to connect with her and eased the tension in the interview room. Mrs Nalo was well-prepared and answered questions based on her experience as a senior educator in the SMT and an SGB teacher component. She was well aware of curriculum and governance issues as she affirmed:

*When they started firing questions, I fired back with smile, looking at them one by one. When they ask about management; wow! That's where I talked about everything because I had experience. I remember one question that even the chairperson got confused; Financial Management, ma'am! I was excelling in that question. I answered until the chairperson was, you know, they were all nodding and*

*they were not aware that they were boosting my confidence. They put their pens down, the chairperson just looked at me even after I finished and said ‘thank you’.*  
[sic]

#### **5.6.4. A Moment of Joy**

On the same day, around five o’clock in the evening, she received a call that informed her about that she had won the post. She related having been so excited. She told her mother and brother and they celebrated with her, even though she was advised to keep it confidential and wait for the appointment and approval by the HOD. She was at least satisfied knowing that even if she is not appointed, because the final decision lies with the HOD, she beat those local candidates. According to confidentiality forms that are signed in the interview room, no-one is supposed to tell the recommended candidate before the approval by the HOD, but people usually break that secrecy. They inform the winning candidate before the approval and this is not allowed.

I too was informed on the same day that I won the post for primary school principalship at Noko Primary. In both instances this was against the rules.) Mrs Nalo’s appointment didn’t take long. It was done within a month as the school was in dire need of a principal, according to her view. She felt good and indicated that that was her special day, though she had to leave colleagues and learners she loved so much and had become so used to.

#### **5.6.5. Last Day as Post Level 2 Educator**

Mrs Nalo’s principal was faithful and very loyal. She disclosed to him about her winning the post and requested him not to tell anyone until she received an appointment letter confirming that it was going to happen. The appointment letter landed in the principal’s hands. He kept it a secret from her. After a while, learners moved out of their classes to the assembly spot and educators followed. She sat there wondering what is happening and why she was not informed. She had no idea about the appointment letter. Ultimately the principal approached the room where she was, and she kept herself busy until he knocked and called her.

She went to the door to hear what he was to say and he said: “you received an appointment letter.” She took a deep breath and responded: “Wow! Hhee ...! Wow!” Then the principal confirmed it and requested a hug from her, indicating his happiness. He told her he was not going to give her the letter in private and that was the reason he invited everyone to the

assembly area. He wanted to announce it and give her the letter in public. Mrs Nalo had mixed feelings about that procedure; she was excited, nervous and felt the pressure befalling on her thinking of going to a new school and becoming the principal for that matter.

She notes, “Tjo! I was emotional”. [sic] At the assembly, when she looked at the learners who were not aware of what was happening, she felt sorry for them, and she wanted to cry. Some educators looked happy, others sad. The principal asked learners to sing; they sung and for everyone’s surprise, he prayed, which he usually didn’t do. He then announced that Mrs Nalo got promotion as Mpuru Secondary School Principal and would be joining the staff that side next week Monday. That was a hard time for her. Some learners started crying and others said: “Oh, to whom will we turn to when we have problems?” [sic] She wasn’t aware that most learners looked up to her until that day. The principal gave her chance to respond and it was not easy for her as she remarked:

*“Yah ... it was too bad and hard for me. They gave me chance to talk to the staff and learners. I didn’t know what to say. The only words I could utter were, uh... ‘guys, I’m really going to miss you. Uh ... I don’t know what, I’m going to face where I’m going, especially at the position of being the principal.’ I looked up as I draw my tears back. Remember, I’m not a crying type but that day, was different” [sic].*

She couldn’t finish saying what she wanted to say because some learners came to her crying, others hugged her and the principal requested that she be left with learners, as he trusted that she would be able to handle the situation. She stayed with learners till five o’clock in the evening, allowing those who cry to do so, listening to those who wanted to speak, but convincing them that all is not bad. Finally they all cooled down and others assisted her to pack her stuff and left for home, which was far from ‘home sweet home’, because of the treatment she received from her mother-in-law.

#### **5.6.6. First Day as a Principal**

In preparations to go to a new school, Mrs Nalo wanted her first appearance to last longer, she wanted to be presentable. Though dressed well in the suit, her first day at Mpuru Secondary School was not exciting. She was nervous. She went to the Circuit Office first to be accompanied by the Circuit Manager. Mrs Nalo was overwhelmed by her Circuit Manager’s reception. She was very happy, as Mrs Nalo specified: “I was impressed by the

way my Circuit Manager, uhm ... you know, welcomed me. She was over, over the moon, you know. She promised to support me and indicated her joy of having the second woman principal.”

Mrs Nalo felt great about her being the second woman principal, though amazed as to what is happening with women. Where she comes from, the only woman principal was her role model leading a primary school. And here, she just learnt she is the second secondary school woman principal. Though unsettled with the matter, her being a pioneer in female principal leadership and management of secondary schools was something that excited her. Upon their arrival at school, they were welcomed by both the School Management Team (SMT) and the School Governing Body (SGB). The Circuit Manager had already made some arrangements as the two structures were ready and waiting for them. The Circuit Manager presented her with both structures, which revealed different attitudes. SGB seemed happy and really welcoming, whereas the SMT seemed apprehensive and discontented.

She internalised her confidence and courage, and hid her nervousness. She acknowledged: “fortunate enough, even if I’m nervous ma’am, you can’t see me. I am able to hide my nervousness.”[sic] Immediately after she was introduced to both the SMT and the SGB, all educators were called to join them. The Circuit Manager introduced her to the staff, which was awkward. Usually if things are well, the SMT is the one to introduce the principal to the staff in the absence of the SGB and the Circuit Manager. But in this school, the Circuit Manager took upon herself to introduce the principal to the three stakeholders. Percentage-wise, Mrs Nalo said about 90% of educators seemed happy. She then assumed that those who seem disappointed might be the ones belonging to the 10% SMT members who seemed displeased. She was also impressed by the Circuit Manager’s statement that made her feel a sense of ownership over the school, in her concluding remarks: “Do you have anything to say to your staff?” Mrs Nalo was cheered by those words and responded: “I’m happy to be part of the staff and I promise the SGB that I’m going to work hard.

I’m not going to disappoint any of you. As long as you are ready to work with me, I promise we are going to take this school to another level.” [sic]

Come the following day, she was to be introduced to the learners, standing with confidence in front of them all. In her introductory speech, Mrs Nalo stated: “I’m your new principal, and I

believe you are good learners, I could see by the way you behave, and as long as you are ready to work, believe me, we are going to enjoy our stay together.” When I asked how she feels now that she is a principal, Mrs Nalo indicated that she really felt great; especially that she is hands on and walks with pride.

She emphasised the fact that she found the school categorised as a performing school, based on good matric results, and that boosted her ego to sustain the performance or improve it. She further spoke of feeling really grateful to be a principal, especially of a secondary school in a male-dominated area, as the second woman principal for that matter. She was elected the circuit coordinator of learners’ enrichment classes after spending three years as a principal in that circuit, which shows that they recognised her hard work and commitment to curriculum issues. And to her, leading all those male educators was a bonus for her ego. She felt gratified doing things male principals fail to do like spending the whole day and night with learners and producing better grades. This really satisfies her.

## **5.7. ADVERSARIAL LESSONS**

### **5.7.1. SMT Meetings**

Mrs Nalo was upfront, telling me that she doesn’t enjoy talking about how they hold SMT meetings, because majority of the SMT are not happy to be led by a woman, causing her difficulty before and during their meetings. Only one SMT member, the second woman in their SMT, Mrs Mpetswa, tries working with her. She declared: “SMT meetings are disappointing. Members are not cooperative at all. Because they are all men except one, I certainly feel that they are not happy that they are led by a woman. When I call meetings Madam, it takes err ... them an hour or two to respond.” [sic] When invited to a meeting, SMT members come in drips and drabs, but Mrs Nalo has her way of dealing with the matter. If she calls and they do not respond, or if she feels the matter to be discussed is urgent, she goes to the deputy principals’ office, holds him by the hand, and goes with him in hand straight to the HOD’s office, and hold a meeting there, because in her experience waiting for them has been waste of time. She expressed the suspicion that her deputy principal is the one who influences broader disobedience. She vowed: “After all, what I need is everything should be done according to the way I want them to be. If I say they have to check written work, they have to do that, no questions asked.” [sic] To ensure that SMT meetings are held, Mrs Nalo always beats her deputy at his own game. When he knows beforehand what the

meeting is all about, he spends most of his time with other SMT members discussing issues to be discussed, and ensuring that other SMT members oppose what the principal intends to achieve. She stopped discussing with him first, and just took him by hand, so that he hears what she has in mind with other SMT members at the same time.

When he (the deputy principal) questioned the procedure, Mrs Nalo told him that she is tired of him sabotaging all her meetings, and further, told him to let other members think independently and decide on their own. She concluded by saying that until he starts acting professionally, she is not going to discuss important matters with him, first as top management, he will have to hear everything at the same time and same place with other members.

### **5.7.2. Staff Meetings**

Staff meetings are inconsistent, though not that nasty, due to uncooperative educators and the influence that the deputy principal has on them. Educators are unpredictable, and choose meetings. Before the meeting could start, Mrs Nalo discussed issues on the agenda with SMT, who in most cases go and share the information with them (educators). When Mrs Nalo circulate the invitation in the information book to all educators, indicating the venue, time and the agenda, they already know what her intentions are for each topic, and decided to either attend or not to attend. According to Mrs Nalo, their non-attendance has recently become a blessing to her, because the day they attended, they either deferred or interrupt the meeting.

### **5.7.3. Memorial Service**

Mrs Nalo spoke of many instances where she felt she was not supported, though she was slowly winning, becoming stronger daily. There is one incident that hurt her the most, that is, the death of a learner, who committed suicide. She was deeply disturbed by the incident, because the learner was in the same class Mrs Nalo was teaching. Memorial service preparations started. She informed all concerned.

The deputy principal and his crew nonetheless decided to continue with their insubordination. It was as if they were not part of the staff of Mpuru Secondary. He always gave excuses when a discussion was to start on what should be done to ensure that the memorial service would

be a success. Mrs Nalo had to single-handedly, from the SMT, see to it that drum majorettes were ready, the school choir was in order, buses booked and paid for, and guests invited. What really amazed her was with regards to the issue of looking for a psychologist to come and counsel learners, especially the deceased's classmates. He agreed to go and outsource the psychologist, but as the week goes by it became clear that he was overlooking the matter. Mrs Nalo finally took it upon herself and went to the nearby hospital in request of such assistance. She declared:

“I finally got one psychologist to counsel learners, because all educators came up with excuses. I assume that was due to my deputy principal's negative influence. It's like some educators were told not to assist. But at the end, everything went well and with prayers everything is possible.” [sic]

Immediately after the memorial service, the deputy principal requested to accompany the class teacher, who was to submit condolences to the bereaved family. Mrs Nalo viewed it as something positive, because at least he was going to meet the bereaved family for the first time five days after the incident had taken place. She thanked God for that action, and he was permitted to go because of the initiative he had taken, in Mrs Nalo's view. She reminded me of educators who were not attending meetings, called in by her, acting with “don't care” behaviour. She remarked:

*Yah ... sometimes when I have meetings there are these educators who don't come, and to me err ... yes, they are not supporting but on the other hand I say thanks, because when they come they disrupt. So, sometimes when you're not supported you must just say thank you because, a person can say yes, I want to support you and do the opposite. [sic]*

#### **5.7.4. Quarterly Schedules**

In addition to the memorial service, Mrs Nalo spoke of her SMT's non-support during the compilation of quarterly schedules and attendance to meetings. She asserted: “But nevertheless ma'am, I said; uhm ... I'm not a failure.” [sic] She worked with willing educators, especially women, and submitted on time, and those who wished them to fail to meet deadlines become surprised when the deadline is met.



Supporters are called names, and they are used to that but continue to work with the principal. With her dividing SMTs and giving them titles of grade heads, each member is supposed to ensure that educators in his/her grade mark submit on time for moderation to be done, and marks are entered and schedule in that grade is completed. Mrs Nalo indicated to have requested the SGB to employ one admin clerk who is of assistance in schedules compilation and some educators are surprised when reports are issued on time. Mrs Nalo remarked: “I am the one who ensures that educators follow their marking policy and submit on time so that I with those interested educators can start compiling the schedule so that when schools close, learners get their report cards and I am able to relax a while.” [sic]

In addition to that admin clerk, she has two other internship learners, paid by two non-governmental organizations, who also come in handy when it comes to ensuring that schedules are compiled and parents receive their children’s report cards on time.

### **5.7.5. Negative Experiences**

#### **5.7.5.1. Mr Malomane**

One day, one of the educators, Mr Malomane, decided to spoil her day. He went to the office when she had two SMT members, the deputy principal and Mrs Mpetswa. He started shouting and pointing fingers at her, and said things that didn’t make sense to Mrs Nalo. It was like he was under the influence of liquor or another kind of a drug, the way he was behaving. He even went as far as asserting, “that is why it’s bad to employ a woman principal” [sic]. Mrs Nalo kept quiet, listened to what he was saying, and nearly cried, as she asserted: “But, err ... believe me, I nearly cried. But I said I can’t cry in front of my subordinates, I’ll lose dignity.” She was surprised by the deputy principal’s behaviour of pretending as if nothing was happening. She expected him to intervene and call Mr Malomane to order, or to calm him down, but he didn’t. She immediately assumed that he knew about this incident, that it was planned. Mrs Mpetswa tried to stop Mr Malomane, who disrespectfully told her to shut up, as he will not tolerate being spoken back to by a woman. Mrs Nalo requested Mrs Mpetswa to give him chance to say whatever he wanted to say, though she felt very bad as she indicated: “you know, I felt down being accused of the things I don’t know. I don’t even feel brave talking about what was said that day, but I think he was provoked by the song I was singing that day.” She was singing a song the lyrics of which



express that her situation will not stay the same, but that God will change it. She was singing it in her mother tongue.

It could be that this is what angered Mr Malomane, because he couldn't understand the meaning of the song. Mrs Nalo verified what the song meant by attesting: "I believe I'm not going to end up here, that's, that's not my aim to end up here, that's why I'm developing myself." That was a bad day for her. She felt very weak and humiliated, and didn't do anything that day at school. She was just in the office thinking and could visualize Mr Malomane standing where he was standing, waving his hands towards her as if he wants to beat her and shouting at her. According to her view, the fact that she withstood that situation revealed to her that she could absorb pressure.

It doesn't matter how she is provoked. She worried less when he accused her of talking behind the deputy principals' back, but this one of being called a devil nearly broke her, but she stayed strong.

#### 5.7.5.2. Confrontation with Mrs Qunu

After realising that educators do not pay attention to schedule policies, she arranged a meeting wherein the staff agreed to observe the department's seven-hour rule. Should they be forced to leave early, they will have to sign the time off register, also called movement register, or early-departure book. One day, SADTU invited its members to a twelve o'clock meeting. Mrs Nalo noted that 'policy is policy' and that it needed to be adhered to, reminding them to sign the register. All educators, with the exception of the three educators signed the register book before they left. When she was overseeing the register the following day, she noticed that three educators didn't sign. She then took the register, gave one learner to give to those educators, who, according to her 'forgot to sign.' She didn't believe her ears when the learner came back and reported that the two educators signed, and that Mrs Qunu refused. When looking at the learner with those overwhelmed eyes, the learner continued: "Mo-the-r, you won't believe it. Even though I was not supposed to say this, but it is not right. Mrs Qunu instructed me to go and tell my stupid principal that she's not going to sign." Mrs Nalo didn't know what to say, especially considering those disrespectful words were said to a learner. She then said to the learner: "Okay, its fine my girl." She took the book from a learner and waited for the learner to go back to the class. She was furious, and thought she had to take action very soon. She vowed:

*I have to react now, woman to woman like my mother taught me. I took that book, but I said God, help me. I want my reaction to be professional. I went to her and I said: ‘Madam, you didn’t sign’. She said: ‘I know.’ Then I said: ‘why?’ She said: ‘I’m not used to signing the early departure book, especially that there is nothing wrong I have done, I didn’t decide to go. My union called me.’ [sic]*

Mrs Nalo reminded her that the Union that she was referring to was the same Union that called all educators from Mpuru Secondary School that day, but all other educators had signed. Another thing that she was reminded of was the fact that it was their agreement to sign every time they are to leave before seven hours. The discussion became more and more heated, but Mrs Qunu remained adamant and rude. She told Mrs Nalo that she is been treated as if she is a criminal while her Union released her. Mrs Nalo responded: “But you are not employed by your Union.”

Then she started talking in her own language, which Mrs Nalo barely can speak, but is able to understand. Mrs Nalo gradually got tired of this, and she asked Mrs Qunu that what would happen if she also decided to use her mother tongue? The response was again provocative: “That will be your choice; it has nothing to do with me.” She then requested Mrs Qunu that they behave like adults, because they are not of the same age, her being younger than Mrs Qunu. Because of the way she was responding, Mrs Nalo started telling what she thought would bring her to order. She said: “what you’re doing is wrong, and you must always remember as the elder you must lead by example.” Mrs Qunu continued to disrespect the principal in a rude way, which led Mrs Nalo to handle her the same way. She continued telling Mrs Qunu about her behaviour, which was uncalled for, and noted that only those people who are not initiated, can behave that way. She asserted:

*You know what; your culture of not taking you to initiation school makes you become a raw adult; and, to show that you are raw, you behave in an unbecoming way in front of your young sisters and brothers here in this staff room. You even said bad words telling a learner about me. I’m not forcing you to respect me, the thing is I thank God that I was taught to respect. [sic]*

She used her culture, learned in going to initiation, as a weapon to fight and discipline Mrs Qunu. She continued portraying her bold and aggressive character; that fighting spirit that her mother taught her.

She stated: "... to show that you are not strong as a woman, you've got only one child because you are a coward. You only gave birth once, the labour pains disciplined you. I've got four kids, meaning that I'm stronger than you even though you are older than me." [sic] She said all those prickly words in front of all the educators in that staff room. She finally felt that she crossed the borders. She indicated that she felt very bad about it even if she is home, and regrets to have reacted that way. She admitted to have been pushed by the words "stupid principal." [sic] Mrs Nalo felt that Mrs Qunu needed discipline and from that day, she's a good, respectful and behaves well according to Mrs Nalo's view. She respects everyone irrespective of the age or position, but this wasn't supposed to happen after the exchange of aggravating words, confessed Mrs Nalo. That was indeed the bad experience and she said she doesn't forget that incident. She is just thankful that at least Mrs Qunu transformed thereafter.

#### 5.7.5.3. Mr Leleme

Another issue that demonstrated that she really can absorb pressure is when she has removed a computer from the deputy principal's table into a strong room. After her appointment, Mrs Nalo decided to share the office with the deputy principal as she attested: "he was using this office; anyway, I didn't want to take him out." [sic] Though he didn't openly refuse, but he moved around the school avoiding the shared office, where one moment he is in a staff room, the other he is with the HODs in their staff room. That's when Mrs Nalo decided to remove the unused computer that was supposed to have been used by the deputy principal into a strong room. Upon realising the absence of the computer on the table, Mr Leleme, one educator who also serves in the Union school's executive, moved around alleging that the principal stole the computer. She once heard him talking to a group of educators saying: "are you aware that the computer is missing and the only person with the key of that office is the principal?" Mrs Nalo immediately knew that Mr Leleme was insinuating that she was the one who stole the computer, as she was the one in possession of the office key. Even after hearing that and observing educators coming into the office one-by-one as if they are looking for other things or want to ask for something; she kept quiet, pretending not to be aware of exactly what was happening.

Realising her quietness, the Union executive committee led by Mrs Ntolwane came unannounced into the office accompanied by their secretary, Mrs Padipe and their additional member Mr Leleme. Upon their arrival in the office, Mrs Ntolwane said: "Madam, we are sorry that we came unexpected, we want to know about the computer which was on this

table.” [sic] With a smile because she had already dealt with the matter and expected them to come, she asked them to bring the sealed box that was under the table in the strong room. They took the sealed box out, opened it, and the computer that they were looking for was inside that box with all its parts as she asked them to check all the components. They were embarrassed and didn’t want to admit how they felt. Instead, Mr Leleme asked why she put it in the box. Mrs Nalo confirmed to have removed the computer from table because the deputy principal was not using it. He was always outside the office instead of staying in the office and she didn’t want people to bump against it.

#### 5.7.5.4. Mr Khoma

Mrs Nalo shared with me another issue, which also affirmed her ability to absorb pressure. She started by laughing and said: “another thing was the African National Congress (ANC) copies.” A certain educator, Mr Khoma, is one of those educators who would not attend Mrs Nalo’s meetings. He is an active member and a branch secretary of ANC in that area. He printed some unauthorised copies on behalf of the party and they were found by other educators who started talking about the matter; some confronted him because it is not allowed. He remarked: “I’m waiting for the principal to call me; she’ll know the stuff I’m made of.” [sic] It was as if he had unresolved issues with Mrs Nalo. Mrs Nalo requested God to give her strength to keep quiet until the right time when everyone has calmed down. One morning she decided to call Mr Khoma into the office. It was like he has already forgotten about it and didn’t think she was still going to speak to him about those copies. In Mrs Nalo’s view, Mr Khoma might have thought that she was afraid of him, because of the influence he knows he has. She directly confronted him:

*‘Sir, I want to ask you about the copies that you made for ANC knowing well that it is not allowed. Even those documents like curriculum vitae and copies of identity documents, which other educators do here, are done per request. You don’t just make a copy without any authorization. I’m not speaking about organization’s copies, no, those are totally not allowed here, and I think you are aware. So please Sir, don’t ever do something that will create conflict here.’ [sic]*

To Mrs Nalo’s surprise, Mr Khoma was apologetic and said he made very few copies. He said: “Uh ... no, no, I’m sorry, I’m sorry,” because she had caught him off-guard. She gave it time. And when he went out, he didn’t talk about it, Mrs Nalo never heard a word in regard to

their conversation as she asserted: “He didn’t talk about it even today; I’m not even sure whether people know that I confronted him.” [sic] Her being quiet and finally have spoken to Mr Khoma showed her ability to be able to absorb pressure.

## **5.8. POSITIVE EXPERIENCES**

### **5.8.1. Leadership Styles**

Mrs Nalo is not afraid of taking decisions and standing by these, and she sometimes does not feel the need to consulting anyone. When asked how it comes about that she is sometimes autocratic and her learners still call her mother, she said she changes, according to the situation. She called herself a situational leader. Where she is required to say ‘no’, she does so without any hesitation. She indicated her leading with passion, and further pointed out that she is democratic even though she sometimes mixes this with autocracy and even a laissez-fair approach. Mrs Nalo uses a combination leadership style, with the understanding that no one style can solve all issues. She indicated that with a school big as Mpuru Secondary, as a principal, one would not shy away from using democratic leadership style, because one has to time and again discuss issues and delegate responsibilities.

Another style she uses to gain the support of educators is to ignore those who are not interested in what is to be done. In most cases, does what they were supposed to have done. She asserts that those educators who were initially not keen to be delegated are now coming to ask, to volunteer doing other things. They volunteer because they felt left out. They are now joining the working team as she asserted: “and my friend, who once confronted me, Mr Malomane; Yoh! He also come and says: ‘Madam, can I help you with anything?’ [sic] Mrs Nalo is now enjoying the support of those who wants to support her, women in the forefront.

Another leadership style that I picked up as we engaged in the conversation is her leading by example. When she teaches, she says she does it in such a way that educators admire her and want to imitate her style of teaching. She considers learner diversity. In her explanation Mrs Nalo said: “it helps because there are those who can learn through demonstrating, some are quite, but don’t undermine them because they can be good subscribers. And those who are talkative I use them as leaders, they want to be heard.” Because of her leading by example, she doesn’t have problems of late coming at Mpuru Secondary School, though the school has a big enrolment with 28 educators. She is the first to arrive at school and the last to leave.

In her statement, Mrs Nalo said:

*What are they going to tell me if they're late, because I will say; have you ever seen me coming late? So they will always apologise, and I'll say: 'don't ever come late. Even educators, who were leaving immediately after the bell rung, have changed these days. They leave learners to go first and then follow. Punctuality is our norm and contact time well protected.'* [sic]

She conducts morning classes from six o'clock every day. When she started it was her Grade 12 class only, and now many educators are doing it from Grade Eight to Grade Twelve. She indicated to be the first one to complete the curriculum each year and when doing revision, other educators seem to envy her. She also portrayed supportive leadership style despite the fact that she was not supported by all so that when there is something again, they give her back her support. She is, in a way, loaning them the support so that their conscience speaks to them if it's time for repayment and they decide to ignore it. Most educators who were supported before are now supporting.

### **5.8.2. Parent-child Consultations**

Mrs Nalo also thinks she has full support of the SGB, and believes that that is what makes her sustain the school's status of being categorised as a 'performing' school. Parents are also supportive, and this is seen when she invites them on a quarterly basis to discuss their children's performance. Each and every learner, especially the Grade 12 learners, come with his/her parent or guardian to interrogate their performance, and agree as to what is to be done to improve performance or sustain it, if it is outstanding. All parents wanted to be there for their children and they do indeed attend on proof that those who attend, their children's performance improves quarter by quarter. Learners are also very comfortable having Mrs Nalo as their principal, with some referring to her as 'mother'. When asked how she viewed the issue of being understood as a mother and a principal at the same time, Mrs Nalo thinks that being a mother and a principal goes hand in hand. She believes she has transferred the love she has for her own four children to all her learners. Mrs Nalo views the school as her family. She affirmed:

*You know, they are so next to me, and whenever they've got a problem I feel it and intervene, whether it's about their health or social issues, I am always there for*

*them. I make sure that each learner at Mpuru gets the support he/she needs. That's how I think I transferred my motherhood at this school, which makes them to call me mother. [sic]*

### **5.8.3. Awards Ceremony**

Mrs Nalo is of the view that some days are so special, they stand out from all other days in one's life. She indicated her first awards ceremony during her first year as her best day especially that it came out as planned, and it was the first award-giving ceremony at Mpuru Secondary School. She invited motivational speakers and organised sponsors, who responded positively. Learners were excited, because they were to receive certificate with trophies, school bags, dictionaries or calculators coming from sponsors. They were recognised for different things and different categories such as excellent performance, outstanding behaviour, and most improved learner – academically or in terms of school attendance, cleanliness and punctuality. Educators were also awarded, as she asserted:

“I also included educators because I wanted a favour [laughs]. I awarded educators for keeping their classes clean, educators who respect time, educators who monitor morning assembly, all those categories you can think of as the principal.” [sic] Another issue that makes her day shine is celebrating colleagues' achievements and motivating them. Even if it's one educator who has achieved something, she initiates and organises celebration as a way of encouraging them, though not all educators attend.

### **5.8.4. Teamwork**

Working as a team is another factor that makes her feel great. When she arrived at that school, she pointed out that team work wasn't taken into account, but she motivated them to work together. She believes that as a team, they achieve more. As a principal and a Life Sciences educator, Mrs Nalo introduced team marking to all educators, with no luck, until she decided to start with a small group of educators in her department. She remarked: “then I said to myself I have to start practicing it in the subject I'm teaching. I involved all educators teaching LFSC in FET.” [sic] All educators in FET were encouraged to form a team. They marked together learners' tests, examinations, assignments and experiments.

They then observed that team marking improves the quality of marking, and reduce teacher workload, especially for those who have large enrolment. According to Mrs Nalo, most



educators experience challenges when it comes to marking and allocation of marks, which has got nothing to do with content knowledge.

They sometimes become unnecessarily strict, or too lenient. Those who are moderated are better evaluators. The worst group is the lenient one because learners are misled as to their content knowledge. According to Mrs Nalo, educators who are lenient usually do not prepare their lessons well and in most cases, bunk classes because they would not be ready during the time they are supposed to go to class. They fail to cover the curriculum as indicated in the pace setters, before learners are assessed. So they pass learners to avoid being held accountable. What Mrs Nalo did was to first train all FET educators in LFSC about the principles of marking. She then realised that they were not conversant with policy documents and they are not using them as they teach. They therefore were not aware of what needs to be covered and the time frames required. At first, they (LFSC educators) thought and were convinced by their colleagues that they are oppressed and abused, but now as she asserted:

*And now they are proud of themselves. We are the first group to complete marking, submit mark lists, subject analysis and item analysis. We do all those on time and not afraid of being moderated. Any moderator can come from the circuit or from the Province we know we marked correctly from Grade 10 to 12.*

Other HODs have copied team-marking and are practicing it, because they admired Mrs Nalo's team when they complete marking on time and having free time when others are still marking. In her team, there is this one male educator, Mr Kgopa, who would always move around bragging and say: "Uh ... are you still marking? Oh! We finished 10 years ago [laughs]" [sic] When one is still having a bulk of papers to mark and someone is walking free and bragging, it's painful. That is why they are now imitating team marking amongst themselves. To Mrs Nalo, this will be an advantage, because sooner or later, all the subjects will be marked and submitted on time, then schedules will be compiled and submission to the circuit will also be made on time. Another important thing that she introduced in this school and finds beneficial is item analysis. After marking learners' work, either tests or assignments, she check question by question as to how many learners got that question correct and how many got it wrong.



It shows her where she needs to concentrate more, and do re-teaching, and which section learners understood. From the first question to the last, she is able to know which question was difficult, which one was achievable, and which one was the simplest. Mrs Nalo is presently assisting other principals to introduce item analysis to their schools. She feels great about being the one to teach male principals. She was asked to teach her colleagues, after she made a presentation that impressed her Circuit Manager.

#### **5.8.5. Changing a Progressed Learner (QP) into a Diploma Material**

Mrs Nalo indicated her ability to ensure that a learner who did not meet pass requirements in Grade 11 finally gets a diploma in Grade 12. Such learners are called the QPs, meaning ‘qualified to progress’. They are promoted to Grade 12 after being retained once, in either Grade 10 or 11, and this poses serious challenges, especially to Mrs Nalo, who targets for 100% pass rate with many bachelors, if not all. It means working harder than what one did before, though to Mrs Nalo, who is used to working hard; it means working beyond her limits. She confirmed:

*I am able to turn a QP to get a diploma. I always make sure that educators come up with the strategies to help the QP's. And I make a follow up that the stated strategies are implemented. After, item-analysing educators are encouraged to put more effort on those who are still behind and encourage those who made it to the envisaged levels or grades. We strive for QPs to get Level 2 or 3 in content subjects and Level 4 or 5 in the two languages and Level 6 or 7 in Life Orientation. I sometimes take the QPs during holidays and camp with them so that they get used to studying. Most of them fail because they don't study. [sic]*

She organises camping and is with them even during the night so that she teaches them good study methods and assist them in engaging in peer-teaching. She always motivates them and encourages those who better understand a subject to teach their class mates. Mrs Nalo is aware that those learners who role-play teaching a subject understand and pass that subject better than those who are taught. She indicated that she groups average learners with the underachievers, and ensures that the above achievers pull those ones along, and not vice versa. Working very close with them is the strategy she adheres to. Learners are encouraged to do what they are doing in Life Sciences to other subjects so that they obtain better levels in all subjects, and finally get a bachelor or diploma.

### 5.8.6. Unamended School Policy

Another issue that really made her feel great was after she developed policies that were in line with national and provincial policies, but addressing situations at school. When she arrived at Mpuru Secondary School and studied the school policies, she discovered that existing policies were not meant to change the situation at hand; they were duplicates of the guidelines given in the form of national or provincial policies.

She then initiated reviewing those policies, first with the SGB, and then the educators. The SGB requested her to come up with draft policies indicating their lack of knowledge and time. She was happy, as she wanted to come up with implementable policies that are relevant to the school's situation. Then, after drafting that policy, she invited the SGB, they sat down, studied the policy, and consented to it. They were happy and didn't amend anything.

The SMT also seemed happy about the policy and copies were then made and given to each educator to study before the staff meeting where they were to discuss the policy and amend where necessary. They were given such copies a week before the meeting. On that day of the meeting, Mrs Nalo was not aware that other educators did not have those copies when she commented: "I believe we studied our policies. As requested, don't hesitate to say where you feel we should amend." To her surprise, Mrs Nyamazana requested permission to talk, even before the meeting could commence. She said: "I want my policy document." [sic] Mrs Nalo amazingly responded: "Uhw! Your policy document, didn't I give you Madam?" she said: "No, you did. The person who took it from me is listening to me now. I want it now." [sic] Out of surprise, Mrs Nalo asked: "somebody took it from you?" Instead of Mrs Nyamazana responding, half of the staff confirmed that their documents were taken from them. Mrs Nalo looked around and only five educators had their copies and the rest concurred with Mrs Nyamazana. Mrs Nalo took a deep breath as Mrs Nyamazana continued: "I want to be straight, Mr Deputy Principal, may you please bring back my, I am not talking about somebody, my document because I want to refer to it now as we discuss." [sic] Then the meeting started to be uncontrollable. Mrs Nalo asked them to give her clarity on what happened. Mr Mnyama said: "Let's continue. They gave Mr Deputy Principal their copies. I'm still having mine." [sic] Assessing how tense the situation had become, the deputy principal confessed: "I destroyed them." This was a real shock to everyone.

From what Mrs Nalo picked up, the deputy principal immediately after educators were given those documents, and were requested to go and read, he moved around influencing them to stick to the old policies and took those drafts from them, until there was a misunderstanding between the two groups on extant rules, then the other group lobbied to humiliate him in the meeting, which they did. Mrs Nalo felt that she is working with someone who was adamant to pull her down against all odds. But after all, she chose to be positive. She requested ten minutes of their time to make copies for those who don't have them, and asked if the meeting can continue with fewer educators having studied the documents. They agreed to continue despite the fact that the majority didn't go through those documents.

Mrs Nalo quickly instructed the administrative clerk to make copies, and they were brought back in ten minutes, as per her request. Policy discussion started and it didn't take long, because after going through three policies, they all agreed that they are good and they accepted them without amendments. She felt rewarded and great about this issue on policies.

#### **5.8.7. Rewarding Event**

When I asked her about what she views as most rewarding, Mrs Nalo confidently said: "Uhw! Their results, Madam, results, especially matric results, because when we talk of results at a secondary school we talk matric results." [sic] She further indicated that she sets herself targets from the beginning of the year. She aims to obtain bachelors for all the Grade Twelve learners, unfortunately some get diplomas, with others receiving higher certificates, which is disappointing. She doesn't choose mediocrity, even though she knows that some will obtain results below her expectations, but for her, excellence is a priority. No one is born mediocre; we just choose it, in her view. She is well aware that she had to work harder to get good results. She acknowledged: "good results don't just come our way; we have to work for them; myself and my HODs, but I have an HOD for commercial stream who is not doing his job at all." Having unreliable and unsupportive HODs, Mrs Nalo in most cases deals exactly with subject educators to ensure that all subjects are thoroughly taught and assessment is well conducted. To her, data is more sensitive. On quarterly basis, she wants to know the subject analysis; how many learners in this subject obtained a level from Level 1 to 7. She alerted:

*After subject analysis, educators realise that, they don't have Level 7 and Level 6 in their subject, which means they have to do something for them to get higher levels. But if you keep quiet and say it's 100%, and then 100% of Level 2 and 3 is not good*

*to me. I conduct one-on-one meetings with subject educators, accounting on the analysis of their subjects, and if one has 5 level 5s, I then ask him/her the strategy he/she is going to use to pick those level 5s to level 6 in the coming quarter. Such meetings are conscientising educators on their roles to improve learners so that they add to the highest levels, Level 6 and 7. [sic]*

She realised that they all want better levels for learners in their subjects, especially when she finally reward deserving educators with highest number of levels during the award-giving ceremony. The commercial stream at her school was underperforming; Accounting, Business Studies and Economics.

She then sat down and thought of a strategy that might assist learners to perform in those subjects. Fortunately enough, one accounting educator retired, and they employed a young educator from the university. Mrs Nalo indicated that she sat down with him, showed him their challenges, and they came up with a working strategy to move the stream from underperformance to performing. They engaged in extra lessons and had weekend studies, day and night. Parents were involved and they showed their support, which impressed Mrs Nalo. She commented: “Believe me, the learners for commercial stream now, they are performing; they are happy, especially that they get better grades.” [sic] This rewards Mrs Nalo in turn, as she indicated that she really values good results. She even indicated that her educators have become results-orientated these days. Those educators’ whose learners achieve Level 7 or 6 seem to enjoy it, and walk with pride.

## **5.9. CONCLUSION**

In conclusion, Mrs Nalo spoke of her vision at Mpuru Secondary, how she ensures that everyone is disciplined, her commitment and dedication to improve learner performance. Though she wanted to be a nurse, Mrs Nalo handled the issue of her being taken to the college of education in a positive way. She finally turned into a committed educator and principal. Being a principal cost her, a husband, but she remained a mother and a principal. Her life was full of challenges, but she worked against all odds to finally lead a school that is said to be performing well. Her stubborn characteristic, which she claims to have inherited from her mother, assisted her in many instances. She being initiated made her stronger, such that she alleged that they were taught to withstand any situation, good or bad. She had a technique in leading the school, where she stood her ground with whoever came her way in a

confrontational mood. The support she gets from the circuit officials is her strength. Though very assertive amongst her colleagues, Mrs Nalo cares for the learners, and it is clear that she added value to the lives of other educators, especially those who are teaching the same subject as hers. She has created an environment that is conducive for them to be at school. At home, Mrs Nalo felt better after she divorced. She claims that she is presently able to focus on the learners as a principal, and spend most of her time at school, without having to explain herself or be beaten on her return home. She really feels better without a husband. She is most rewarded by learner results; when they passed with good grades. That is why she doesn't care what she meets along the way, as long as she finally obtain good results, which brings her school into the ranks with other performing schools.

## Chapter 6

### The Meeting of Elizabeth and Mrs Nalo: A Capability Approach

#### 6.1. INTRODUCTION

Throughout the years, women have experienced various challenges and setbacks in senior education positions, some of which have received attention in this study, where I have told my own story, alongside that of Mrs Nalo. We are women, and mothers and principals of secondary schools. In this chapter, I look at the commonalities of our stories, and link them to Capability Approach (CA). These commonalities include the ways in which we acted as agents, the ways in which our internal and external environments shaped our choices as leaders, and the way in which we converted our capabilities into functionings. I argue that we used agency to assert power over institutional and social obstacles, in order to achieve our functionings. In this study, I give practical expression to the ideal of functionings, and suggest that the desired goal we each sought was in order to be a principal. In achieving our functionings, the internal and external environments we lived and worked in played key roles. With respect to our internal environment, I focus on my and Mrs Nalo's determination to fight against all odds, and to become that which we valued, namely to inhabit the role of principals in our respective school communities. I will also discuss the external environments that influenced our choices and how we converted the resources at our disposals in achieving our functionings. While I take a positive and optimistic stance in this chapter, I recognise we were not always able to achieve our desired functionings, and that at times, we were not able to realise fully the potential of our capabilities.

In the final analysis, I argue that although CA aims to enhance the developmental opportunities for those who have been marginalised, its gaze and application (Robeyns 2006; & Walker and McLean 2012) to date is largely on the professional aspects of our lives. It seems that CA turns a blind eye to those of us who are also wives and mothers, in addition to being professionals. I argue that CA requires an extended scope so as to recognise the complexity of achieving functionings for women who are also wives and mothers at the same time as they are professionals.

I argue that our capabilities and ability to assert agency is mediated by the complexity of our multiple roles as professionals who are leaders, mothers and wives.

## 6.2. LOOKING BACK: UNDERSTANDING CAPABILITY APPROACH

I conducted this study with the sole purpose of understanding the experiences and challenges of women principals in a distinctly South African context. The literature reviewed in Chapter Two reveals that women principals experience their leadership roles differently, when compared to their male counterparts. Regardless of these challenges, women manage to obtain such positions and convert resources at their disposals to achieve their functionings. I made use of auto-ethnography, ethnography, as well as a narrative approach to explore challenges and experiences of myself and Mrs Nalo, respectively. Both stories provides the holistic picture of women's leadership and management experiences and challenges and build on and extend CA. Their capabilities to achieve the kind of lives they have reason to value is clearly explained by the main claims of CA, its concepts, and how they build agency and convert resources in order to achieve their functionings. According to McQuaid, Hollywood and Edgell (2011), capabilities include the ability to make appropriate choices.

CA is directly concerned with human capability and the freedom to explore such capabilities. This means that CA focuses on what people are able to do and be, without being pressurised (Hammock, 2012). Building on CA, agency emphasises the freedom that a person should have in taking decisions and making actions that she deems necessary (Kotan, 2010). CA therefore prioritises people's beings and doings, as well as their opportunities to realise their functionings (Otto & Ziegler, 2013). It discourages pre-judging individuals in determining what they may be capable of achieving (Otto & Ziegler, 2013; Robeyns, 2006).

According to Alkire (2005), functionings are all those various things a person may value doing or being, and for functionings to be achieved, people are to convert the resources at their disposals to fit that which they want to achieve. The conversion of resources depends on an individual's personal, environment as well as social factors in which they find themselves (Frediani, 2010).

## 6.3. COMMONALITIES

### 6.3.1. Acting as Agents

As agents, CA sees us as having the capacity to choose, determine or negotiate ends (Kotan, 2010). Kotan further defines an agent as a person who acts and brings about change, and whose attainments can be pronounced in terms of her own beliefs and intentions.

Building on CA, agency emphasises the freedom that a person should have in taking decisions and making actions that the person deems necessary, without being pressurised. As agents, I and Mrs Nalo ensured effective teaching and learning in our schools. Although we often encountered resistance from SMTs, we found ways around such obstacles. By introducing quarterly accountability sessions, SMT were required to meet parents to account for the academic progress of their children. This approach meant that SMT members recognised that neither Mrs Nalo nor I were the people to whom they were eventually accountable. On regular basis, for the preparation of accountability sessions, the SMT conduct subject meetings with each educator to track curriculum coverage, audit learner written work, and ensure that classes are effectively attended by both educators and learners.

Redirecting their accountability served, to some extent, to undermine their resistance to us as women and as school leaders. As Robeyns (2005) shows, functionings refers to the actual occurrence of a state of affairs. What is ultimately important, according to Robeyns (2005), is that people have the freedom to lead the kind of lives they want to lead, to do what they want to do, and be the person they want to be. According to Gasper (2007), CA focuses on people's ability to achieve the things they value, no matter what challenges come their way. Despite our Deputy principals' negative influences, the SMTs' lack of confidentiality and factions that they deepened, I and Mrs Nalo worked against all odds to finally get what we valued most as principals, namely good matric results, so that our schools might be classified as performing schools as per the Limpopo Province benchmarking of 60% and above. We also asserted our own agency and encouraged the agency of other educators through a series of institutional policy mechanisms that encouraged teachers to take responsibility for their work. To be able to manage large enrolled schools, we introduced grade heads, to ensure that all grades receive proper and consistent teaching and learning.



We delegated work to willing educators as a way of sharing leadership, and empowering them. To ensure that contact time is adhered to and teaching and learning is effective, both I and Mrs Nalo are the first to arrive and the last to leave the school, unless there is compelling cause for us to leave early. We introduced different monitoring tools such as early departure registers, time registers, leave measures registers, class period registers, and learner behaviour-audit logbooks. These monitoring tools assist us in encouraging educators and learners to be at school on time every day, and educators to teach whilst learners learn.

We both engage in activities that motivate all stakeholders; educators, learners and parents, such as quarterly awards-giving ceremonies, a quarterly report on learner academic performance to both learners and parents, prayer days, Heritage Day celebrations, Grade Nine graduation ceremonies, and farewell functions.

We organised memorial services in case of death cases at our schools, and took part in comforting the bereaved families. We are able to identify small but significant aspects of school duties, for example, exercising an open door policy to all stakeholders, in particular parents and learners, giving out food that is left from National School Nutrition Programme (NSNP) to vulnerable families, working with neighbouring clinics and hospital to identify and support learners with challenges and families in need, and we consult and treat all stakeholders with respect, encourage innovation, and reward excellence. I argue that this approach of caring, giving emotional support, motivating learners, educators and encouraging parents to be involved in the school gave practical form to Zimmerman's (2006) understanding of agency. Zimmermann (2006) perceive agency in terms of motivation, beliefs and emotions.

Looking at all activities, it is evident enough that the ability to care and nurture learners in particular is in us to such an extent that some learners call us 'mothers', instead of principal. All these changed how we were perceived as women, and gradually, parents and other educators came to believe in and support us.

### **6.3.2. Building Agency**

Raised from illiterate families and in a society where girls were not taken seriously, especially when it came to education, I and Mrs Nalo fought against all odds to become principals. Leaving our children with our unsupportive in-laws was one difficult matter, but

we managed to attend schools until we obtained the necessary qualifications for principalship. CA sees human life as a set of “doings and beings” called ‘functionings’ in a work environment, which constitute that which makes a life valuable (Kotan, 2010: 370). However, CA pays cursory attention to the challenges that women as wives and mothers face as they struggle to achieve desired functionings. For instance, I had to part with my husband, and our marriage was postponed, in order for me to obtain my qualifications. After completing my Secondary Teachers’ Diploma, my husband sent his uncles to ask for the date to complete the marriage.

My mother sent my brother to come and call me as I was busy writing an assignment. After telling them that I was from church, where I was busy with my assignment, she said to my husband’s uncle: “as far as I know, you don’t want anything to do with schooling in your family; so, as long as she still continues with her studies, she will do that here.” [sic] Indeed I stayed home until I obtained my B.Ed. Honours, after which she agreed to our wedding. Mrs Nalo had to be assertive to further her studies. Despite her mother-in-law’s discouraging words “Uhm ... according to our culture, you can’t go back to school. When you want to complete your school you do it when you are at your home. When you are here, you are a Makoti (daughter in law) and that’s all,” she continued to study. This didn’t hold Mrs Nalo back, and she continued furthering her studies and coming back home in the middle of the night, leaving one of her children with her housekeeper, though she was expected to be home each day by four o’clock in the afternoon. According to Hammock (2012), functionings are various things that a person manages to do or be in leading a life they value. Mrs Nalo and I managed to be principals, mothers and wives, though our husbands seemed uncomfortable with us being principals. Mrs Nalo asserted:

*Uhm ... I didn’t get support from my husband. It was like he was jealousy and he started insulting and beating me up. He alleged that I got the post because I was a woman and had an affair with somebody who has given me the post. When I tried explaining that I don’t even know anyone that side, then to him it wasn’t true at all.*  
[sic]

What we felt internally, the hurt, the unease, the pressure and fear of failure, the pressure of being wives in cultural communities that denied our independence, of being mothers who were expected to bear responsibility for our children with little or no support from their

fathers, was not for public view. When people see us in our offices, they looked at us as principals who have to manage and lead the school effectively. We made public our professional selves, and our struggles as wives and mothers, as women working in a predominantly male environment, were hidden in closed off places within ourselves. According to Wells (2013) and Robeyns (2005), CA focuses directly on the quality of life that people are actually able to live and achieve, and its core characteristics are its focus on what people are effectively able to do and to be. The focus on doing and being seemed to obscure our emotional and non-professional selves. Yet, these parts of our selves played a significant role in how we were able to ‘do and be’. Although Frediani (2010) makes a case for the mixture of personal, environmental and social factors in shaping the conversion of capabilities into functionings, I take his view, that “knowing the goods a person owns or can use is not sufficient to know which functionings he/she can achieve; therefore we need to know much more about the person and the circumstances in which he/she is living” (Frediani 2010: 175). The experience and qualifications that Mrs Nalo and I, in other words the worldly possessions that we may have owned, did not adequately speak to our ability to achieve functionings. Instead, our “person and circumstances” Frediani (2010: 175), were much more deeply implicated in our ability to achieve functionings. And this part of our lives and beings was not visible, nor could we easily share this with people in our respective environments. I and Mrs Nalo worked very hard to avoid our schools falling into the category of underperforming schools, and to prove that women can lead secondary schools effectively and efficiently. According to Robeyns (2003), Sen argues that the most important thing in evaluating the person’s well-being is to consider what people are actually able to be and do. On the surface, and what was visible to others, was that we were able to be effective principals.

However, while CA empathises with us as the principal, the fact that we were scared and consistently anxious, not only about our professional lives, but also our lives as wives and mothers could not be adequately understood within the framework of a CA. The internal environments of Mrs Nalo and I were notably different. Mrs Nalo took on a strong, visible assertion of her beliefs. She said that going to initiation school taught her to be strong and to avoid crying, but to approach all challenges head on.

She was raised by a mother who believed that issues should be faced head on as well, and without delay, and she encouraged her daughter to not shy away from a physical fight if it

meant asserting her rights. Mrs Nalo viewed initiation as a turning point in her life, and was further motivated by her mother, aunt and, the first woman principal of a nearby primary school. Unlike Mrs Nalo, I was more restrained, and took a much quieter position. My calmness and quiet manner was arguably different from Mrs Nalo's forceful approach. Nevertheless, we were each driven by a similarly strong conviction that we could be good principals. Like Mrs Nalo, I too was motivated to achieve my aspirations by family and close colleagues. I was motivated by my younger brother and the deputy principal in a secondary school where I matriculated.

Frediani (2010) points out that how well one does that which she wants to do, will be influenced by factors surrounding that person. Mrs Nalo and I had different positive and negative external environmental factors which differently impacted on our opportunities to convert capabilities into functionings. We were raised differently and we therefore assert ourselves differently. For instance, in each and every challenge, we came up with ways of dealing with it.

### **6.3.3. Converting Capabilities into Opportunities**

Gasper (2007) argues that CA focuses on people's ability to attain the things they value despite the challenges they face. Put differently, this suggests that CA seeks to convert capabilities into conversion factor opportunities that can achieve functionings. According to Robeyns (2005), conversion factors refer to the degree to which a person can transform a resource into a functioning. Robeyns (2003) argues that the value of resources depends upon individuals' ability to convert them into functionings.

Though the department of education expects all schools to hold meetings, I and Mrs Nalo didn't find it easy to hold such meetings, and the fact that women principals experience their leadership roles differently, when compared to their male counterparts, played a key role in our ability to convert resources and capabilities into functionings (Berges, 2007; Frediani, 2010). McQuaid et al. (2011: 6) assert that rather than just focusing on whether a person is in work and the conditions of the work that they do, "we would also need to consider their access to resources to get or improve their job and their motivation and their ability to identify and take opportunities that they value."

While regular staff and SMT meetings may be considered a resource that could be used to manage the school effectively, the meetings were frequently experienced as obstacles rather than resources, given the resistance we faced from SMTs. Despite the lack of support for certain school activities such as memorial services, award-giving ceremonies, graduation parties and Heritage Day celebrations, these activities take place successfully as we delegated duties to those who are willing to work. In delegating clear areas of responsibilities for each member of the SMT where they would need to directly address the staff on topics related to their area of responsibility, we were able to improve accountability, and to some extent, limit their ability to negatively impact school management.

## **6.4. LEARNING POINTS FOR POTENTIAL WOMEN LEADERS**

### **6.4.1. Introduction**

In chapter two, literature was presented on the challenges faced by women principals of secondary schools despite all the confirmatory action policies and measures that have been used in many countries to reduce the imbalances of the past in education departments. Regardless of equity legislation and increasing numbers of females with advanced degrees, the numbers of men and women who hold secondary school administrative positions continue to be disproportionate to their numbers in the teaching profession (Krumm, n.d. 28). Some of the challenges indicated in this study include balancing domestic and work responsibilities; building confidence; lack of support, encouragement and respect, role models, mentors, sponsors and networking; as well as gender stereotyping and sexism. Chapter four outlines my challenges as both a woman and a principal of a secondary school and some of the lessons I learnt, which may be of great assistance to other potential women leaders. Chapter five details Mrs Nalo's story; her challenges and the lessons learnt which potential women leaders can learn from. The two stories will be converged and learning points will be discussed in order to assist potential women leaders in this section.

### **6.4.2. Identifying the most influential persons in your life**

Both Mrs Nalo and I were able to identify our mothers as influential persons in our lives. In my case I had, in addition to my mother, my younger brother who timeously encouraged me to continue registering for higher degrees after I managed to listen and follow my mother's advice of continuing with my studies from Grade 11. My mother chose to send me back to

school despite the meagre salary she earned as a domestic worker. Her concern was for my education and nothing else. Because we both (Mrs Nalo and I) listened and respected our mothers, we managed to study further and attained principalship posts. Although illiterate, our mothers became our sponsors and we both managed to convert our mothers' characters, though different, into motivations for us to study further. As principals, neither of us received the mentoring our male counterparts received and we orientated ourselves as newly appointed principals. It doesn't matter that one is raised by a single mother; mothers always want what is best for their children.

According to Ely et al. (2011), we were supposed to learn new roles by identifying with role models. Unfortunately, I was the only woman principal in my circuit and Mrs Nalo, though the second woman principal in her circuit, Mrs Nalo was the only one whose school was performing well. Pirouznia's (2006) study reveals that female role models in higher administration positions act as an important influence in terms of career aspirations for other women. As we engaged in our formal conversations, Mrs Nalo mentioned that she was a member of the Black Management Forum. It was good to hear that as I also am the member of that managerial institution. As women and leaders, it is important for us to look for developmental structures so that we can be exposed to other managers. In my opinion, woman leaders should seize every opportunity to engage with developmental organisations, because networking is essential for all women. In Krumm's (n.d. 28) view, aspiring female principals should cultivate strong support systems, seek out mentors, and strengthen their professional networks.

#### **6.4.3. Building collegial relationships**

First impressions are lasting. Women principals are evaluated by the way they conduct their meetings, with SMTs, staff, SGBs, parents and labour organisations, and by the respect they show towards stakeholders. The findings in Tony and Glover (2016: 211) "show emerging evidence about the development of school leadership and management in South Africa but they also highlight on-going challenges, including poor learner outcomes, conflict with teacher unions, uneasy relationships between principals and school governing bodies, and leadership which remains focused on administration rather than teaching and learning". Having read the literature confirming the challenges worldwide made me feel that I was not alone and other women leaders may learn from that. Both Mrs Nalo and I conduct meetings in a professional way. We ensure that the agenda is presentable and contains all procedural

matters as expected and that items follow each other logically. If there is someone who always disrupts meetings, especially when it is a member of the SMT, it works better if the person is involved in presenting the items on the agenda. It also works for us to ignore those who are not interested and to delegate duties to those who are willing even if they are not in management.

#### **6.4.4. Ensuring that effective teaching and learning occurs**

Although the SMTs in the two schools were divided and did not discharge their core roles, that is, providing effective school leadership and management that promote the school ethos and are conducive to the delivery of quality education and positive learning experiences for all learners (Collective Agreement 1 of 2008: 49), curriculum delivery was effective. As construed from this study, Mrs Nalo and I are both committed and dedicated to improving learner performance to the extent that learners in both schools call us “mother”. We have chosen to use the stereotype of nurturer and mother to our advantage in order to further the goals of teaching and learning. We spend much time with the learners in our schools. Mrs Nalo acknowledged feeling guilty for neglecting her own children and also further acknowledged that good results come from hard work.

#### **6.4.5. Delegation and motivation**

Mrs Nalo and I feel rewarded by the excellent matric results which to us come with a price, as we are sometimes forced to work with educators directly because some HODs are reluctant to do their work. Despite their reluctance, we still get good grades with the help of willing educators and learners’ understanding that for them to achieve well academically, dedication to their studies is key. We both regard learner achievement as our top priority. Prinsloo (2007: 148) states that having a view of the whole curriculum, developing an appropriate culture and accounting for consistently high standards are aspects of the roles and responsibilities of the SMT. All other activities such as awards ceremonies, memorial services, graduation ceremonies and strategic planning session are successfully conducted due to delegation. Because we are learner-focused, we employed teamwork, concentrating especially on willing educators. Focusing on those educators who are not willing to work is a waste of time. Both Mrs Nalo and I delegate duties to other educators to ensure that work is done efficiently and due dates are met.



#### **6.4.6. Stakeholder involvement**

Mrs Nalo and I are aware that results come from different angles; we consult parents regularly on their children's academic performance, engage in team marking and outsource to people who have passed matric to assist in capturing of marks for us to submit on time. Mrs Nalo and I analyse results and communicate them to parents and learners every quarter and, together with those parents, come up with strategies to improve term 1 or term 2 results. Parents really appreciate us consulting them on their children's performance. When analysing subject results with individual educators or in a staff meeting, educators also realise that they need to do better to improve their subject performance, and that assists us in sustaining our school's performance. Jacobs (2006: 109) advocates that data assists in setting the correct pace of teachers' lessons, whether the teacher is too slow or fast or has moved on to the assessment before students were ready. Millward et al. (2009: 149) revealed how instructional leaders organised the collection of baseline data to identify how important the schools' underachievement problem was in his/her school.

### **6.5. ADVERSARIAL LESSONS**

#### **6.5.1. Cliques in the school, lack of confidentiality and support**

In both the schools, there were factions within the SMT and the staff. The deputy principals at both schools were not happy that they had not been appointed to the post of principal. In both instances they tried their best to divide the staff and the SGB and to pull us down. They tried their best to jeopardise all activities that we organised. If anything was said to be confidential and to be kept within the management, these deputies would ensure that some of the educators found out before they were supposed to. They influenced anyone they came across to ensure that the school management and leadership failed to reach the intended goal. However, not all the educators agreed with the principals being undermined. Mrs Nalo and I know our staff well and those who are not easily influenced are focused on to ensure that work is done despite the negative influence of the deputy principal.

##### **6.5.1.1. Men attempting to take control**

Another lesson we learnt is that men will always try to take over in the presence of women principals. Mrs Nalo's uncle did not want her to be a nurse but an educator in the belief that educators spend most of their time at home and will therefore be able to take care of their



husband and children. Her husband wanted her to give up her position as principal; he made her feel guilty and led her to believe that she neglected her children when he attempted to rape their last born. Her deputy principal made advances to her in her first month at the school as a way of undermining her as principal, in the belief that as her lover he would be able to control her. In all those instances, Mrs Nalo resisted. Her resilience allowed her to overcome all these men who tried to undermine her. Mrs Nalo is thus a model of resilience, as indicated by Howard and Irvin (2012).

In my case, Mr Zitha, the deputy principal's right-hand man, requested that I appoint him as chief operating officer (COO), a position that does not exist in the education department. Initially, I took it as a request and declined it, but it became clear that it was a demand when he started inviting the ANC leadership and the upper structures in the department, using his political influence to exert pressure on me. I received threatening anonymous phone calls as a way of forcing me to relinquish the post. Knowing the policies gave me leverage to resist.

According to several studies in Howard and Irvin (2012: 680), "resilience is a positive coping trait that is attributed to an individual's ability to overcome hardships". By developing resilience as a coping strategy, Mrs Nalo and I persevered.

#### 6.5.1.2. Inability to handle salary differences

Despite all the challenges we experienced, we finally managed to lead and manage our school successfully; however, on the other hand, we both lost our husbands. As we successfully moved up the ladder, both our husbands became jealous. They both felt undermined and could not tolerate the fact that they earned a lower salary than their wives. My husband's inferiority complex eventually led to our divorce, whilst in the case of Mrs Nalo, although he left all the housekeeping to her, his attempt to rape their daughter was the last straw. Being a calm person, I initially thought I would make my marriage work but I learnt that one way or another, for some men who earn less, it becomes a threat in their lives and they find it difficult to handle the fact that their wife's salary is more than theirs. To them that is an insult. No doubt, culturally we have a long road to travel if we are to accept that it's not okay for women to earn more than their husbands.

Finally, it is arguable that, above all, it takes courage and determination to become a woman principal. Mrs Nalo and I worked in adversarial contexts that repeatedly sought to wear us

down. It took great resources of courage to keep going and to lead. Arguably, we are both aware that many more challenges lie ahead of us.

## 6.6. CONCLUSION

In the final analysis, I argue that the logic of CA applies primarily to people who are in a professional environment. As mothers and wives, I and Mrs Nalo gave up the two most important things in our lives for us to achieve our functionings as principals. Our real motherhood took backstage to pseudo-motherhood at school. We both felt we had to place the needs of our own biological children as secondary to that of the needs of the learners who became in some ways our pseudo-children.

We felt good being called ‘mother’ by learners at school, while our biological children missed that opportunity to some extent, because our homes were unpleasant places to stay, having to deal with insecure husbands and having to spend every minute we had at our schools ensuring that work for the school community is well attended to. Mrs Nalo affirmed feeling guilty for not raising her children the ‘right way’, as she called it, because she spends most of her time at school. She asserted: *“I was not there for them because I immediately went to this post when they were still young. They just grew up on their own with this father who was very bully, until I ended up divorcing him after he attempted to rape our last born.”* [sic]

In addition to giving up our real motherhood, we both divorced. When I disclosed to her that I am a divorcee too, Mrs Nalo’s comment seemed to summarise our respective experiences: *“it seems like women principals must be divorcees, though it gives us a clue that men are unable to stand the promotion of their own women. They take it as a challenge. So those that are leaders and still get support from their spouses are lucky.”*

I suggest that if CA is extended to include the apparently invisible elements of women’s lives in their profession, of also being called upon to be both wives and mothers, the value and role of personal lives in one’s ability to achieve functionings may be given greater credibility. Because those invisible elements of being a mother and a wife play a crucial role in whether or not one is able to use agency to convert resources into opportunities that can lead to valuable functionings. As indicated by Pillay (2007), women find it difficult to speak about

their families in their working stations. According to Pillay, the fear of speaking about the domestic space emanate from the fact that it is viewed as detrimental to one's intellectual image, though I think it would be of great assistance emotionally to those who are able to find avenues to do so. Although CA's openness and incompleteness allows us to identify space in all aspects of our lives (Gasper 2007), I want to argue that prioritising the professional, especially of historically disadvantaged people limits the scope and potential of a CA. I point to the complexity and multiplicity of peoples' lives, especially women, who are professionals, mothers and wives (Pillay 2007), to show that our professional lives are only a part of who we are, what we value, and the functionings for which we strive. CA needs to wholly consider the complexities of being a woman leader, a wife, and a mother, in order to enhance our ability to use capabilities and resources to achieve much-valued functioning

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## APPENDIX 1 - INVITATION LETTER OF PARTICIPATION



UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA  
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA  
YUNIBESITHI YA PRETORIA

Opvoedkunde School of Educational Studies/  
Skool van Opvoedkundige Studies  
Department of Education Management  
and Policy Studies

Enquiries: Khumalo KE  
Contact No.: 081 019 1813  
E-mail: e.keku@yahoo.com

P.O. Box 4787  
MOKOPANE  
0600  
10 February 2016

The Principal

MADAM

### INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE IN A PHD RESEARCH DISSERTATION

I Keku Elizabeth Khumalo am a PhD student in Education Management, Law and Policy Studies at the University of Pretoria and the completion of the degree requires my conducting an interview in the form of engaging in a conversation.

I hereby request you to participate in my research study. The title of my study is:

*Working against and working towards: narratives of South African women principals*

My research question is:

How do the stories of women principals speak to the challenges of leadership in South African schools which will be guided by the following two sub-questions:

- ✓ What are the challenges experienced by women principals of secondary schools?
- ✓ How do women principals lead in antagonistic contexts?

I chose you as my participant in this study as you are the only woman principal of a secondary school which is also categorized as a performing school. I am going to conduct interviews in the form of a conversation using an audiotape at a time and place that will be convenient to you. We will do three to four conversations. The duration for each conversation will be two hours. Interviews will be conducted primarily in English and where necessary, Tsonga or Sepedi will be used to clarify issues which I will later translate into English.

Everything you are going to say or do will be confidential. I will use pseudonyms to protect your identity and that of your school. You will receive transcripts of the interviews to verify its accuracy. Should you wish to correct information in the transcripts, this should be communicated to me in writing within seven days of the receipt of the transcript.

The study will benefit all readers especially women who aspire for secondary school leadership as they will know that there are other women out there who worked against all odds to succeed in school leadership. Records pertaining to the research project will be stored at the University of Pretoria for 15 years.

Should you feel uncomfortable during the research study, you may withdraw.

Looking forward to your participation in this study

Yours truly

Khumalo KE (Researcher)

Signature : .....

Date:.....

## APPENDIX 2 - CONSENT AND CONFIDENTIALITY



UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA  
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA  
YUNIBESITHI YA PRETORIA

Opvoedkunde School of Educational Studies/  
Skool van Opvoedkundige Studies  
Department of Education Management  
and Policy Studies

### PART A: LETTER OF CONSENT

I -----, the principal of a secondary school,  
have read and understood the purpose of Khumalo KE's research study and hereby agree to  
participate in this research study.

Signature

(Participant)

Date:

Signature

(Researcher)

Date:

**APPENDIX 3 - CONSENT AND CONFIDENTIALITY (CONTINUED)**



UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA  
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA  
YUNIBESITHI YA PRETORIA

Opvoedkunde School of Educational Studies/  
Skool van Opvoedkundige Studies  
Department of Education Management  
and Policy Studies

**PART B: GUARANTEE OF CONFIDENTIALITY LETTER**

I, Khumalo Keku Elizabeth, hereby guarantee anonymity and confidentiality to  
.....in her participation in my PhD studies titled:  
Working against and working towards: narratives of South African women principals.

This confidentiality will be guaranteed during and after the research process as well as in the  
final research report.

..... Date:.....  
(Participant)

..... Date:.....  
Researcher: Khumalo KE

..... Date:.....  
Supervisor : Prof Vimbi Mahlangu

## APPENDIX 4 - LETTER TO THE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION



UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA  
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA  
YUNIBESITHI YA PRETORIA

Opvoedkunde School of Educational Studies/  
Skool van Opvoedkundige Studies  
Department of Education Management  
and Policy Studies

Enquiries: Khumalo KE  
Contact No.: 081 019 1813  
E-mail: e.keku@yahoo.com

P.O. Box 4787  
MOKOPANE  
0600

19 November 2015

The Head of Department, Limpopo Department of Education

Private bag X9486

POLOKWANE

0700

### **APPLICATION FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH WITH A WOMAN PRINCIPAL OF A SECONDARY SCHOOL IN LIMPOPO PROVINCE, WATERBERG DISTRICT.**

My name is Keku Elizabeth Khumalo and I am registered for a PhD in Leadership Management, Law and Policy at the University of Pretoria. My supervisor is Dr Vimbi Mahlangu, contact number: 082 755 3154. I therefore request permission to interview a woman principal of a secondary school in Mogalakwena district. The title of my study is: Working against and working towards: narratives of South African women principals.

The purpose of this study is to understand the experiences and challenges of women principals in a South African context.



I do this by telling my life story as a woman, a mother and a principal of a secondary school alongside my co-story teller who I request permission to engage.

Confidentiality and anonymity will be respected in the interviews and the report.

Should you have any queries, you may contact me on 081 019 1813 or my supervisor at 082 755 3154.

Hope you find this in order.

Yours truly

Khumalo KE (Applicant) .....