# TURNING AROUND A DYSFUNCTIONAL SCHOOL CULTURE:
# AN AUTO-ETHNOGRAPHY


by


**Penelope Jane Alston**


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## Declaration

I, Penelope Alston, declare that the dissertation **Turning around a dysfunctional school culture: an auto-ethnography,** which I hereby submit for the degree **MAGISTER EDUCATIONIS** at the University of Pretoria, is my own work and has not previously been submitted by me for a degree at this or any other tertiary institution.

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P.J. Alston

5 January 2018

## Dedication

This body of work is dedicated to the memory of my mother, Doreen May Luden, a quietly spoken philanthropist, who lived her values every day through her compassion towards others. Mom, thanks for being my inspiration and role model. You taught me the importance of hard work, grit and determination. The example you set will remain one of the richest blessings in my life. It is important to highlight my loving husband Stuart whose patience and unwavering support has been stoic. Thanks for taking over dinners and for enduing long and lonely weekends and holidays.  To my wonderful children - Cameron and Lauren and daughter-in-law, Amy who have genuinely encouraged and supported my studies – heartfelt thanks.  I look forward to being your mom again.

# Acknowledgements

To have achieved this milestone in my life, I would like to express my sincere and grateful thanks to:

- My Heavenly Father, who provided me the strength, knowledge and perseverance to complete this study;

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# ABSTRACT

## Examining moral leadership in turning around a dysfunctional school culture: an auto-ethnography

This research represents a particularly personalized account of my journey in turning around a dysfunctional school. Poor performing schools, poor quality education and schools that are dysfunctional have become an enduring challenge in South Africa and much theorising has gone into advising schools on what they should do to turn their schools around. This study approaches the problem from a different angle where I document my own journey in turning around a dysfunctional school. In the study I narrate my leadership experience through a self-study to further understand how my leadership impacted a primary school and succeeded in turning it around. Two important strands in the literature inform the theoretical lens of the study: Fullan's ideas on the management of change, and Nieuwenhuis' notion of developing a learning (or value-driven) school. Using auto-ethnography as the qualitative research approach, I reflected on and documented my experiences and supplemented these with interviews with stakeholders involved in the process of turning the school around, thereby ensuring a 360° view of what had happened. This type of qualitative research is a conversation between me and the individual reading it and brings the reader inside my personal experience as principal. My evaluation through the methodology of an auto-ethnography narrative illustrated the complexities I faced as a newly appointed principal in a dysfunctional school. My leadership experiences, personal trials, staff interactions and challenges involved in handling change in a school setting were documented through lived experiences as a principal and may resonate with the experiences of other principals faced with similar challenges.

My analysis provided me with a deep understanding of myself as leader and an understanding of continually developing and building meaning and purpose, while reminding the staff of the school's vision and value, what was to be accomplished and who was being served as a result. Leadership from my lens offered me the opportunity to foster change that was meaningful and impacted positively on the school community. I was able to grow professionally in an environment conducive to learning embedded in my mission to serve. The journey may be of value to those who are appointed as principals in dysfunctional schools and may add to the knowledge field of the practical management of schools.

**Language editor**

I, Ailsa Williams, confirm that I have edited **Examining moral leadership in turning around a dysfunctional school culture: an auto-ethnography** by Penelope Alston.

Signed: *Williams*

Date: 9 December 2017

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# CHAPTER ONE

# GENERAL BACKGROUND AND ORIENTATION

## 1.1 INTRODUCTION

The 1990s was a highpoint of change in world history. The victory of democracy in South Africa after forty years of apartheid brought great hope to our country and happened at the same time as the fall of Eastern European communist states (Christie, 2008).

One of the most important tasks facing the newly elected government during this time was to rebuild the education system. Forty years of apartheid had left deep inequalities in schooling. The radically divided education departments were moved into provincial departments. A system of funding was developed which made it possible for the poorest provinces and schools to receive more than the wealthier schools. More schools and classrooms were built and resources improved, governing bodies were set up for all schools and a measure of self-management was progressively introduced. Yet twenty two years on several shadows fall over the initial achievement of change (Christie, 2008).

During his opening address at the Saamtrek Conference in Cape Town, February 2001, Nelson Mandela reminded the nation that we cannot take the values enshrined in the Constitution for granted. "Adults have to be reminded of their importance and children must acquire them in our homes, schools and churches" (Mandela, 2001). The question that we have to ask ourselves seventeen years later is; have we succeeded in making the values enshrined in the Constitution a part of ourselves? Despite the right to basic education, so many teachers and pupils are frequently absent from school. Personal security is compromised in many schools where pupils and teachers abuse each other verbally, physically and sexually (South Africa, 2001). Teachers are held responsible for conditions at their schools which in many instances are beyond their control and even find themselves criticised by the communities in which they work (South Africa, 2001). Going to school for many pupils often means running the gauntlet of criminals, drugs and guns. The right to

freedom of expression is often discouraged and even censured in schools (South Africa, 2001). The dysfunctionality of much of our education system often prohibits young South Africans from the Constitutional right of choosing their profession freely. Furthermore, pupils are still compelled to learn in a language that they and often their teachers do not understand (South Africa, 2001).

At the time of the Saamtrek Conference, the South African Schools Act of 2001 committed the country to an educational system that would redress injustices in the provision of education (South Africa, 2001). Yet, despite the provisions of the Constitution and the attempts at redress by the government, international influence and the borrowing of educational ideas from other countries (Sahlberg, 2015), evidence shows how badly the South Africa system of education is performing, disappointingly poorly even against countries in the Southern African region (Christie, 2008). South African schools are amongst the world's worst performers in maths and literacy as suggested by international tests (Bloch, 2007). There is no single reason why schools succeed or fail, instead there is a network of interrelated factors: educational, political and cultural (Sahlberg, 2015). The awful reality is that some 60 – 80 % of South African schools today might be called dysfunctional (Bloch, 2009). We should be careful not to think that all dysfunctional or faltering schools are schools from previously disadvantaged regions. Sometimes even schools in more upper class areas can fall into the trap of becoming dysfunctional. This study relates the story of one such upper class school that had fallen into disarray. The story/narrative of this study aims to answer the enduring question: How to turn the tide on poor quality education and restore a culture of sustainable teaching and learning?

## 1.2 PROBLEM STATEMENT

Education is embedded in history, the economic and social past and present. The transformation of educational systems is not simple; and there are very few quick fixes (Bloch, 2007) but it is possible taking time, patience and determination (Sahlberg, 2015). Unravelling this challenge in the South African context, will take much thinking, organizing, work and enormous effort to build consensus and direction around fundamental priorities (Bloch, 2007). The starting point might well

be to look carefully at the influence of leadership in turning around a dysfunctional school culture. Senge (1999) begins the discourse by advocating that successful organisations are building communities of leaders and learners where more learning takes place through continually creating and sharing new knowledge.

Sergiovanni (1992) classifies schools as such communities of learners who have the capability to improve and advance themselves under the right conditions where staff and pupils alike learn. Learning by one adds to the learning of others, creating a community where there is an improvement in the school culture. Barth (in Sergiovanni 1992:125) argues that the principal in a community of learners no longer has to be the instructional leader, pretending to have all the answers but rather the crucial role of the principal is that of head learner, celebrating, experiencing, displaying and modelling what is hoped and expected of teachers and pupils. It is against this background that I discuss the problem statement.

Tied to this problem statement is a bigger discourse that has dominated South Africa over the last twenty years, that of turning the tide on poor quality education and restoring a culture of teaching and learning in schools. The drive of the Department of Education has been to identify and turn around dysfunctional schools. A starting point was the moral regeneration initiative. In 1999, the Department of Education announced the Tirisano Project. The goal of this project was to create safe disciplined environments in keeping with the essence of the Constitution and the Bill of Rights of 1996. Thoughts and considerations of this project paved the way for a "Values, Education and Democracy" initiative (Joubert, 2007; Solomons, 2009).

The Report of the Working Group on Values in Education was published and distributed widely for public comment. This report culminated in the second initiative known as the Saamtrek Conference on Values, Education and Democracy in the 21st Century (South Africa, 2001). The principle educational role of the Manifesto was to propose collective social values, which through education could foster social cohesion thus aiding and encouraging the transformation of society. Based on the recommendations of strategic initiatives of the Department of Education specifically the Report of the Working Group on Values in Education, the Saamtrek Conference on Values, Education and Democracy and the Manifesto on Values, Education and Democracy; the following values were recognized for inclusion into the curriculum:

accountability, equity, multilingualism, openness, social honour and tolerance (Joubert, 2007 ; Solomons, 2009).

The Manifesto outlines sixteen strategies for infusing democratic values in young South Africans in the learning environment. These include strategies for improved school functioning through nurturing a culture of communication and participation, advocating commitment as well as competence among educators and strategies focusing on the curriculum as a means of instilling knowledge, skills and values in young people and using sport to form social bonds and develop nation building at schools (South Africa, 2001). It is against this framework that my story begins.

To summarise: schools are faced with numerous key challenges including restoring a culture of teaching and learning, providing effective leadership, developing staff competencies, developing the value-base of the school which all need to jell together in a manner which will make the school functional. The question that guides this study is: how do we achieve this?


## 1.3 RATIONALE

Five years ago I found myself in the cauldron of becoming the principal of a dysfunctional school and I had to become the agent of change to turn this school into a functional one. I believe that others could learn from my story, but telling my story makes me vulnerable. I do not claim any super skills or talents, only that I am a typical female principal tasked with turning around a school. This is my story.

If I could emulate anyone's leadership style it would be that of my mother. My mother was the biggest influence in my life. She lived her values every day through her compassion towards people. I will cherish her unconditional love and the inspiration of her example will remain one of the richest blessings in my life. She epitomized Christian principles and values; she was the heart of our household growing up.  My brothers and I learnt from a very early age the difference between right and wrong and the consequences thereof. We were taught to persevere and never give up.

We lived in a working class suburb of Cape Town. Life was not easy for my parents. As a young girl of fourteen my mother was forced to leave  school in standard six as

there was a depression in the country at that time and she found work in the OK Bazaars selling shoes to supplement her family's income. My father on the other hand went to war in 1939 after he matriculated at seventeen and returned to South Africa forever changed after the horrors he had witnessed. Both my parents sacrificed much, determined to give their three children the best education that had eluded them both. My father worked hard at keeping down two jobs in order to provide for his young family sending us to the best schools and providing us with all that he could afford.  He left home before sunrise on cold wet winter mornings in Cape Town, armed with his sandwiches and a thermos flask of coffee to catch a train to where he worked as an assistant postmaster.  When the doors shut to the public at 5:00pm, he began his second job, toiling late into the night, sorting letters.

My mother's sheer hard work, determination and resilience had a profound effect on me. A humble lady with a dry sense of humour, she put her family's needs before her own. She was a quiet philanthropist, with a heart for helping people and she led by example. She did not believe in complaining but rather finding the best solution to a problem. Her wise counsel was that if something was worth doing, it was worth doing it to the best of one's ability. The principles taught me by my mother have had a significant impact on my life: resilience, humbleness, keeping the moral high ground at all times, acceptance of responsibility and following through on this responsibility. My mother was an exceptional example of moral leadership, the philosophy I have come to embrace. Even though my father held the position of authority in our household, my mother had more influence - she was the heart and the hand.

My childhood played a part in the choice of my career in education. On reflection, it was the start of my own vision, what I saw when I closed my eyes. The early beginnings of this vision and deeply instilled values helped guide my life and provided the direction necessary when charting the course of change in my role as a newly appointed principal of a faltering school. Moral leadership was a significant, powerful and compelling leadership style I adopted in turning around a dysfunctional school culture. In order to facilitate change, I had to look at my leadership style (Sergiovanni, 1992) and factors that impacted on my ability to promote change including staff attitude, my personal values and philosophy regarding education as well as strategies to foster a learning environment (Fullan, 2016) This study then is

also about me, about my own development and how my personal and professional self-have shaped me into the person I am today and continue to do so.

This study is designed to provide a detailed account of my auto-ethnographic research in which I critically analyse the outcomes of my leadership style in turning around a dysfunctional school culture. Throughout this journey, I documented my experiences within a stressful yet rewarding environment which has provided me with a better understanding of leadership and changing a school culture. This study was prompted by my need and desire to learn about change and how leadership affects change. Although it has become commonplace in South Africa to talk of dysfunctional schools, I prefer to use the term faltering schools. As with any construct, the definition of a faltering school is marked by perspectivism because it depends on how faltering is defined, measured and interpreted (Bergman, 2013).

## 1.4 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

From the statement of the problem presented above emanated the following research question:

What processes and approaches were used in turning around a dysfunctional school to becoming fully functional again?

This study is guided by the following secondary questions:

*Sub Question 1*
What processes were put in place to initiate change at the school?

*Sub Question 2*
What was the focal point of the turnaround strategy used in the case study school?

*Sub Question 3*
How was a moral leadership approach adopted and what was the outcome of the leadership approach?

*Sub Question 4*
What lessons could be learnt from it?

## 1.5 AIMS AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

International surveys that South Africa participates in, [1]TIMSS ,PIRLS and SACMEQ suggest that we have the worst education system of all middle-class countries that participate in cross - national assessments of educational achievement and worse still our performance  against  many low-income African countries, is inferior (Spaull, 2013). The problem of poor education is compounded by moral decay, a lack of discipline, ineffective leadership and a breakdown in the culture of learning and teaching (Rossouw, 2003). Nieuwenhuis (2007)) adds to the  argument that  the most prominent factor influencing the learning environment in South African schools is the conduct of pupils. The school at the centre of this research proposal was not much different from the scenario sketched above. From studying and analysing the story of a largely faltering school in the process of change and by gaining an authentic insider perspective we could learn much about educational transformation. As indicated earlier, the challenge I faced on becoming a school principal was to integrate my knowledge of moral leadership and management with my knowledge and understanding of teaching and learning, and then to flavour it with the right attitude and integrity so that the school community started to emulate and aspire to my example (Nieuwenhuis, 2007).

From studying and analysing the story of a largely faltering school in the process of change and by gaining an authentic insider perspective we could learn more about educational transformation.  South Africa's performance against many low-income African countries is inferior (Spaull, 2013). The problem of poor education in South Africa appears to be compounded by poorly functioning school systems, a lack of vision, moral decay, an absence of discipline, ineffective leadership, low staff and pupil morale, communication barriers, poor attendance of both staff and pupils and a breakdown in the culture of learning and teaching (Kruger, 2003; Spaull, 2013; Pretorius, 2014). Kruger (2003) suggests that the root cause of these problems is  an absence of a sound philsophy, values and norms which shape the deeper attitiude of role players in the school setting.

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[1] TIMSS    Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study
   PIRLS       Progress in International Reading Literacy Study)
   SACMEQ  Southern Africa Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality

Considerable research exists regarding leadership styles and how leadership contributes to educational transformation. However, less research has been conducted on moral based leadership focusing on key change themes that will turn around a faltering school. Nieuwenhuis' (2007) elements of a learning school contributes to the body of knowledge on purposeful reform. Thus, this study has the potential to increase the knowldege base on the topic of examing moral based leadership in turning around a faltering school culture. This study, in a complex modern society where the pace of change is fast and leadership needs to be radically different from what it has been, has the potential to show that Nieuwenhuis' model is key to large scale educational transformation (Fullan, 2002).

## 1.6 CLARIFICATION OF TERMS

### 1.6.1 Dysfunctional/faltering school

Very often people classify schools as either functional or dysfunctional. Functional refers to the way in which something (the school) works or operates in fulfilling its purpose and role in an effective manner. On the contrary, dysfunctional schools are schools in a state of turmoil (Shipengrower & Conway, 1998) where turmoil is used to describe a system that is unstable. Shipengower and Conway (1998) argue that the turbulent environment that often typifies education requires an answer different from the traditional approach of diagnose-plan-implement-evaluate that only the term 'chaos' expresses the energy and vigour, fluctuating and extraordinary complexity that current educational administrators face (Shipengrower & Conway, 1998). The term chaos, however, seems harsh in the case of many poor performing schools and for that reason the term 'faltering school' will be used in this study. A faltering school in this study is one which is not effective (fully functional) in comparison to other schools (Bergman, 2013) within a geographical area of ten kilometres because of unique challenges and resources, the local school context and its micro history (Bergman, 2013; Pretorius, 2014). Apart from weak organization, faltering schools are typified by one or more of the following characteristics: there is absence of leadership, vision and values, a lack of school policies, a negative school culture and climate, ineffective administrative practices , poor communication and guidance, insufficient staff development opportunities, inadequate discipline, as well as poor

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parent-teacher relationships and evidence of structural degeneration (O' Sullivan & Green, 2005; Nieuwenhuis,2007).

### 1.6.2 Leadership

Leadership is as old as time and has its roots since the beginning of civilization (Stone & Patterson, 2005). There have been various insights on leadership through the ages but the last thirty five years has seen the rise and fall of many models of leadership; authentic leadership, autocratic leadership, charismatic leadership, collaborative leadership, laissez–faire leadership, transactional leadership, transformational leadership, steward leadership and servant leadership (Rhode, 2006; van Deventer & Kruger, 2011). Since the early nineteen hundreds there have been thousands of empirical investigations and studies about leaders and leadership (Bennis & Nanus, 1985) yet little has traditionally focused on moral based leadership. Sergiovanni (1992) contends that leadership has become little more than a buzzword and that moral authority is missing as the hand of leadership has been separated from its head and its heart. In trying to understand what drives leadership, bureaucratic, psychological and technical-rational authority has been over emphasized, seriously disregarding moral and professional authority (Miller, 2002). The leadership style adopted by a principal can have a positive or negative effect on school development (van Deventer & Kruger, 2011).

### 1.6.3 Servant leadership

Robert Greenleaf (1977) first coined the term servant-leadership in the 1970s after reading Hermann Hesse's novel *Journey to the East* when he determined that the significant meaning of servant-leadership was that the great leader is first experienced as a servant to others (Spears & Lawrence, 2004). For Greenleaf (1977), the natural feeling of wanting to serve then brings one to aspire and seek to lead. The difference is displayed in the care taken by the servant to make sure that other people's highest priority needs are served (Spears & Lawrence, 2004). The concept of servant-leadership has resulted in a host of different characteristics from numerous authors. Servant-leaders are good listeners, have empathy, forgive, have a high sense of self awareness, are effective at building consensus, have the ability to think beyond day to day realities, have the foresight to accomplish the school's

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vision and are accountable. Servant-leaders also display a commitment to the growth of people and serve in order to build community (Spears & Lawrence, 2004). Hunter (2004) identifies six characteristics of servant leadership which work interchangeably with each other: patience, kindness, humility, respect, selflessness and forgiveness. Liden, Wayne, Zhao and Henderson (2008) define a servant leader as one who brings out the best in his/her staff and one who relies on one-to-one communication to understand the desires, potential, abilities and goals of each staff member in the school.

### 1.6.4 Change and change management

Fullan (2002) recommends six guidelines for understanding and managing the change process. Firstly, the goal is not to innovate the most but rather carefully using logic. Secondly, it is not enough to have the best ideas. A principal needs to work ideas with staff and find mutual commitment and meaning to new ways of doing things. The change agent should be mindful of the implementation dip that is the early difficulty of trying something new. Fourthly, managing change means seeing resistance as a positive force and looking for ways of addressing concerns. Good effective leaders make people feel that even in the most difficult times, problems can be discussed productively (Fullan, 2002). Fifthly, reculturing is part of managing change of what people value and how they work together to accomplish change. Lastly Fullan (2002) advises that there is no short cut to transformation, reculturing involves hard day to day work. Evans (2001) is of a smiliar view, that the impact of change hinges on the individual characteristics of the staff, the school itself, the nature of the change and the way change is presented. Although growth and development are synonymous with change so is grief and bereavement which a principal can overlook. It is not just the logic of change that matters but the psychological as well (Evans, 2001). Peter Senge (1999) aptly uses an analogy of gardening when he writes about change. We still think of schools as machines that can be put in order by driving change but in fact change should be cultivated. Change can never be forced and therefore the principal has to integrate change and build a bridge between the old and the new, linking as Evans explains (2001) the future to the past and at the same time emphasising existing strengths.

## 1.7 THEORETICAL LENS

In order to turn around a faltering school one has to examine the process of change which Fullan suggests as a five step approach (Fullan, 2002). To effect change the principal has to look at improving her moral purpose which will only flourish if she cultivates it (Fullan, 2002). Secondly, Fullan suggests further that understanding change means ensuring that the staff does not feel overwhelmed by the demands that change can bring but rather that the principal develops capacity and commitment ensuring that guidelines for change are clearly stated (Fullan, 2002). It is also not enough to have the best ideas; the principal has to have the capacity to get staff to buy into ideas (Fullan, 2002). During the change process staff can experience what Fullan (2002) describes as an implementation dip, where there is a real fear of change and a lack of understanding and skill to make the change. Principals need to be sensitive to the implementation dip and present good ideas well while at the same time listening to staff who have doubts about proposed changes (Fullan, 2002). Transforming the culture of a school means seeking, critically assessing and selectively incorporating new ideas (Fullan, 2002).

Relationship building is second to moral purpose and is crucial to establishing a professional learning community. An effective principal must have the ability to combine emotional and intellectual acumen (Fullan, 2002). The third component is that of knowledge building. Schools invest in technology and training but seldom in knowledge sharing and creation (Fullan, 2002). The practice of knowledge sharing is part of the routine of creating a collaborative school culture. Knowledge sharing should be a core value in a school setting and procedures established to embody this value in action (Fullan, 2002). Coherence making is the final and fourth component in leading in a culture of change. Fullan (2002) posits that staff cannot be directed along a linear path as unforeseen circumstances are inevitable. Change means there will be disturbances and differences of opinion which must be reconciled (Fullan, 2002). It is the responsibility of the change leader, the principal to effectively guide staff through differences and enable differences to surface.

Closely associated with the change process is leadership style. There is a growing interest in studying values, ethics and the moral elements of educational leadership

(Greenfield, 2004). Nieuwenhuis (2007) advocates adopting shared values which guides and directs a school in improving its functioning. To achieve this, a values driven school involves staff, pupils and parents to identify what values the school will use as the core of its operation (Nieuwenhuis,2007). Once an agreed framework has been developed, it must permeate all aspects of school life (Nieuwenhuis,2007). This is the heart towards improving a faltering school. Rhode (2006) adds further to the discourse advocating that moral based leadership brings ethics into all organizational activites. Practically implemented, this means factoring moral considerations into all day to day functions in a school. Moral based leadership is a style that recognizes the importance of values and attitudes in decision-making (Senge, 1999).

The dilemma I faced on taking up my position as principal was the difficulty of effecting change and the way to do it. In order to turn a largely faltering school culture into a successful educational functioning and sustainable one, I required a comprehensive understanding of a values driven school environment. Nieuwenhuis' (2007) theoretical model supported the rationale of developing a policy structure through the establishment of values synonymous with a learning school culture.

A learning school can be classified as one where interaction is focused on learning with the aim of achieving specific outcomes (Nieuwenhuis, 2007). Although a learning school environment supports, facilitates and promotes quality teaching and learning, it is a values-based climate that fosters fairness and respect for others (Nieuwenhuis, 2007). Nieuwenhuis' (2007) framework of a learning school incorporates four important elements namely; its focus, the principles that guide it, its support base and interaction in the classroom.

**1.8 Focus**

A learning school has a clearly defined vision and purpose rooted in collectively agreed values. There is a focus on learning outcomes as well as the vision and mission of the school (Nieuwenhuis, 2007).

**1.8.1 Principles that guide a learning school**

Newmann, King, and Youngs (2000) and Nieuwenhuis (2007) concur that professional development ought to address all aspects of staff capacity to advance knowledge building and the collective work of the school.

**1.8.2 The support base of a learning school**

A learning school sees itself as publicly accountable to the local community for the service it renders to the pupils. The staff and parents see themselves as accountable for the example they set the pupils (Nieuwenhuis, 2007). Developing a positive school discipline policy and code of conduct that supports shared values is possible after a shared value framework has been established (Nieuwenhuis, 2007).

**1.8.3 Interaction in the classroom**

Firstly a learning school places importance on its relationship and involvement with the pupils. Once an agreed values framework is developed, it must permeate all aspects of school life and the community should actively support and model it (Nieuwenhuis, 2007). Interaction between staff and pupils should reflect how the agreed values are lived (Nieuwenhuis, 2007). Changing a school into a learning school requires re-energising, re-inventing, renewal and re-invigorating the whole school into a dynamic environment in which the pupils, staff and parents thrive in genuine inquiry (Beatty, 2007). If a school is to experience renewal, the school community needs to redefine purposes and process together which can only be done through sincere and honest collaboration (Beatty, 2007).

## 1.9 RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

### 1.9.1 Research paradigm

The key ontological point of departure in this research is that people are active constructors of their own reality in the form of multiple, intangible mental constructions which are socially and experientially based. These constructions are alterable, as are their associated realities (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). This study evolved over five years, however, its value will change with time and will provide a unique understanding for each person who reads it (Maree, 2011; Yang, 2011).

### 1.9.2 Research approach

This can best be known through a qualitative study where I present a theoretical framework for narrative knowing by plaiting together constructivist, humanist, feminist and hermeneutist theory (Maree, 2011; Creswell, 2014; Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Yang, 2011) as the rationale for narrative inquiry.

### 1.9.3 Research design

This qualitative study then is a personal narrative, an auto-ethnography, a vehicle of reflexivity to detail my journey on the processes and approaches I used in turning around a dysfunctional school culture (Walford, 2009). I am writing retrospectively and selectively about my experiences emanating from my appointment as principal of a school with a declining school culture (Creswell, 2014). This auto-ethnographic study allowed me to study myself as a principal through the prism of my personal life.

### 1.9.4 Data collection

Data collection took the form of written communication, free flowing narrative interviews, and auto-vignettes. I focused on all types of written communication that shed light on my study and on which I could reflect. In the interest of crystallisation, documents served to corroborate the evidence of the narrative interviews (Creswell, 2014). Narrative interviews allowed for continued endeavours to place specific experiences, events and understandings into a meaningful context (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Using a narrative approach, the agenda of the free flowing interview was open to change and develop depending on the participants' experiences and so

I collected stories about myself as a leader and changes made in the school. Key to this case study was reflective vignettes. I wrote of my experiences beginning with my appointment as principal. As informant providing the information, I then reflected on and analysed information.

### 1.9.5 Participants and sampling

The criterion for selection included those participants who could accurately recall the period prior to 2013. In collecting the data, I interviewed six different categories of participants: two heads of department, three administrative staff members, two teaching staff members, four grade seven learners, two chairpersons of the school governing body both past and present as well as two support staff members.

### 1.9.6 Data analysis and interpretation

The qualitative data gathered from interviews was analyzed using Creswell's (2014) seven step systematic data analysis approach. Raw data was collected and transcribed narrative interviews were prepared for analysis. I read through the data several times to become familiar with it all. After this review process I coded the data using descriptive wording. I then worked through the identified codes and grouped the data according to categories.

### 1.9.7 Apparency, transferability and verisimilitude

This narrative relies on criteria of apparency, transferability and verisimilitude. Apparency can be considered in terms of how the reader makes sense of the details and the degree of recognition of someone's life (Clandinin & Connelly, 1998). Transferability describes the process of applying the results of research in one situation to other similar situations (Colorado State, 1996). For auto-ethnographers, validity means that a work strives for verisimilitude; meaning it conjures in the reader a feeling that the experience described is lifelike, believable, and possible, a feeling that what has been represented could be true.

## 1.10 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

It is almost impossible to write and publish auto-ethnography ethically. Relational ethics are heightened because as a narrator I am using personal experience and am not only implicating myself in my work but also staff members with whom I value close interpersonal relationships (Ellis, Adams, & . Bochner, 2011). The Research Participant Informed Consent Form assured participants of the confidentiality of the information shared with me.

## 1.11 STRUCTURE OF THE DISSERTATION

To answer critical questions emanating for the research problem, this study is divided into the following five chapters:

### Chapter 1: General Background and Orientation

The first chapter contextualises the study, identifies the research problem, research questions and research objectives. The rationale and significance of the study are also stated. It further explores the research methodology and outlines the remainder of the thesis.

### Chapter 2: Literature Review

This chapter presents literature in two areas related to my study. Firstly, I provide an overview of what is known about faltering schools and the challenges these schools face. I also discuss what literature may suggest as a strategy to turn around faltering schools. Secondly, I provide a theoretical lens which explores a values driven approach that supports effective change in schools.

### Chapter 3: Research design and methodology

Chapter three discusses the choice of auto-ethnography narrative from its paradigmatic basis, focusing on the interpretivist underpinning in greater detail. I also discuss the process of selecting participants who shed light on my auto-ethnography narrative. I identify and justify my choice of data gathering instruments and my data analysis strategy and establish why these methods are appropriate to address the research questions raised in chapter one. The chapter concludes with apparency, transferability and verisimilitude criteria used and ethical considerations.

**Chapter 4: Auto vignettes**

I present five vignettes in my attempt to conceptualize my journey as a newly appointed principal in turning around a faltering school culture. Through this narrative, I draw on experiences that have transformed my way of thinking and have influenced me as a principal through a process of remembering, reflexivity, reflecting, learning, changing, being and becoming!

**Chapter 5: Presentation of research summary, recommendations and conclusions**

In this chapter I present the discussion and interpretation of the main findings and conclusions of the study. Links are made between the findings of the study and the existing body of knowledge outlined in the literature reviewed in chapter 2. Furthermore, recommendations and suggestions for further research to improve school practice are also made.

# CHAPTER 2
# LITERATURE REVIEW

## 2.1 INTRODUCTION

Many South African schools are plagued by poor leadership where principals have been found at the centre of corruption, abuse and often violence compounded by frequent absenteeism (Christie, 1998). It seems as if principals have lost their moral compass. The inherent problems that afflict our schools are not likely to be remedied with the present hierarchical leadership approach (Senge, 1999) where the principal is often seen as untouchable and not held accountable for his/her actions.

As can be deducted from Christie (1998) and Senge's (1999) observations, a principal's leadership style has an influence on school effectiveness and can have a positive or negative consequence on school improvement (Fullan, 2002; van Deventer & Kruger, 2011). Much research exists about school leadership and what distinguishes effective principals from ineffective principals and effective schools from ineffective schools (Sergiovanni, 1992). Leadership, over the last four decades has focused for the most part on issues of style, decision-making and assessing consequences, compliance, performance and organizational effectiveness (Sergiovanni, 1992). However, some research has suggested that leadership needs to be redefined as an action rather than behaviour, as spiritual rather than psychological, emphasizing professional and moral authority (Sergiovanni, 1992). The aim of this study was to examine such a style of leadership with an emphasis on a values driven approach to managing effective change and to improving a school's culture. The study examined processes and approaches in turning around a faltering school to become a fully functional school again.

In this chapter I explore literature in two areas related to my study. Firstly I provide an overview of what is known about faltering schools and the challenges these schools face. I also discuss what literature may suggest as a strategy to turn around faltering schools. Secondly, I provide a theoretical lens which explores a values driven approach that supports effective change in schools.

## 2.2 DEFINITION OF AN EFFECTIVE AND A FALTERING SCHOOL

A review of literature reveals that effective schools are defined by amongst other things: shared decision-making, a school vision, supportive staff where goals are clearly communicated and an environment that promotes learning and parent involvement (Bergman, 2013; Prew, 2007; Kruger, 2003). Similarly Teddlie and Stringfield (2007) include the following characteristics in their definition of an effective school: high and appropriate expectations, monitoring of learners and staff progress and ongoing professional development. This means that school effectiveness goes beyond the direct management of teaching and learning but includes adaptations of the management approach and organizational conditions as well (Scheerens, 2016).

Although it has become common place in South Africa to talk of dysfunctional schools, the term 'faltering school' is preferred (as was indicated in chapter 1). Conversely as with any construct, the definition of a faltering school is marked by perspectivism because it depends on how faltering is defined, measured and interpreted (Bergman, 2013). Pretorius (2014) notes that the signs of faltering or impaired functioning in the workplace remain similar across all organisational types not just schools. A faltering school in this research project is a school marked by a series of interwoven indicators (Bergman, 2013) which O' Sullivan and Green (2005) attribute to leadership style, a breakdown in the school's ethos and organizational systems. Ntuta and Schurink (2010) expand further on O' Sullivan and Green's definition and ascribe poor physical and social facilities that impact teaching and learning, weak and unaccountable leadership, administrative dysfunction, inadequate communication and insufficient discipline and poor relationships as characteristics of a faltering school. It is common place to talk of dysfunctional schools in the South African context when due to impaired functioning; these schools produce poor educational outcomes (Pretorius 2014). Bergman (2013) argues that a faltering school may have many parts that are highly functional. I prefer the term faltering as it implies that whatever is not effective can be corrected.

Faltering, in this study, is a school that is less effective in its processes which are aimed at achieving set goals and objectives. On some level, all schools ought to

perform an identical function (Fleisch & Christie, 2004).To illustrate this point Christie (1998) explains that in South Africa there are state controls over key structural forms of schools, such as school admissions, teacher registration, teacher compensation and accountability, age regulations for pupils, pupil - teacher ratios and curriculum. However schools each demonstrate different levels of control (Christie, 1998). The closed door of the classroom can bring a degree of autonomy for the teacher's work; yet the state may apply tight regulations in order to ensure equal opportunities for all pupils (Christie, 1998).

On another level, each school is different because of its unique challenges and resources, local context, social group composition and micro history (Bergman, 2013). It can be argued that there are some criteria that apply to all schools in describing them as effective or faltering in their functioning (Bergman, 2013). However on another level, a particular group of problems associated with an action period of possible solutions could make nearly any school effective or faltering depending on the particular setting, perceptive or purpose (Bergman, 2013). The breakdown of the culture of teaching and learning in a school does not suggest there is an absence of a culture of teaching and learning (Christie, 1998). What is does suggest is that the school culture that has developed is unfavourable towards teaching and learning and of a doubtful quality (Christie, 1998). A faltering school in this study is one which is not effective in comparison to other schools (Bergman, 2013) within a geographical area of ten kilometres because of unique challenges and resources, the local school context and its micro history (Bergman, 2013; Pretorius, 2014). Apart from weak organization, there was an absence of leadership, vision and values , a lack of school policies, a negative school culture and climate, ineffective administrative practices, poor communication and guidance, insufficient staff development opportunities, inadequate discipline, as well as poor parent-teacher relationships and evidence of structural degeneration (O' Sullivan & Green, 2005; Nieuwenhuis,2007).

**2.3 CHALLENGES FACED BY PRINCIPALS OF A FALTERING SCHOOL**

The challenges faced by a principal of a faltering school can be equated to the image of a gatekeeper balancing between two worlds; the outside world which presents itself in the form of parents, the school governing body, (although also part of the inside world of the school) and provincial and national directorates and on the other hand the inside of the school which consists of the staff and the pupils (Kelchtermans, Piot and Balle; 2011). The expectation of the inside world of the school is for the principal to provide the necessary conditions for the smooth running of the school, where the staff expect the principal to always be on their side (Kelchtermans, et al., 2011). The solution for school principals is to integrate their knowledge of leadership and management with their knowledge and understanding of teaching and learning, and then to flavour it with the right attitude and integrity so that the school community emulates and aspires to the example set by the principal (Nieuwenhuis, 2007).The challenges faced by principals of faltering schools is discussed in sub headings under the umbrella of a systems approach (Nieuwenhuis, 2007) juxtaposed by my own experiences.

**2.3.1 Leadership and management**

An important factor contributing towards a school's breakdown is poor leadership and management skills (Christie, 1998; Nieuwenhuis, 2007). Principals of faltering schools lack authenticity and legitimacy. They are incapable of running the daily functions and administrative operations in their schools (Fleisch & Christie, 2004). These principals are also unable to build a vision to achieve the goals and objectives of the school resulting in staff and pupils often pulling against the principal's authority (Fleisch & Christie, 2004).

The school under discussion had weak leadership and management structures. There was organisational breakdown, information was not communicated which led to speculation, grievance and disciplinary procedures were vague, staff meetings were not held regularly and there was no evidence of meeting procedures and more importantly no evidence of minutes of meetings. Management meetings were non-existent and general administration practice was poor (Christie, 1998).

It is necessary to establish proper and effective leadership and management systems and structures with clear procedures and clear lines of authority, powers, responsibility and accountability for a culture of teaching and learning to operate (Christie, 1998). Van Deventer and Kruger (2011) identify that a principal of an effective school provides a clear sense of direction and offers inspiration where ideas and thoughts are articulated which in turn motivates staff. The principal also builds teamwork by encouraging collaboration. The principal sets an example and empowers staff by working with them (van Deventer & Kruger, 2011). Furthermore the principal of an effective school is seen as the organisational architect, initiating and orchestrating change, someone who is also responsible for leading professional development and demonstrating values to guide relationships (van Deventer & Kruger, 2011).

### 2.3.2 School organisation

According to van Deventer and Kruger (2011) schools are organisations within which interactive, interrelated education and management processes take place in six areas: curricular and extra-curricular affairs, staff affairs, school community relations, physical facilities, financial affairs and administrative affairs. To effect good organisation, the principal delegates allocated duties and responsibilities giving staff authority to achieve specific organisational outcomes (van Deventer & Kruger, 2011). The task of teaching and managing is delegated to staff who contribute their intellect and skills to achieve the aims of the organisation (van Deventer & Kruger, 2011). These areas are managed under the guidance and direction of the principal. Good organisation structure, which is key to effective leadership, reduces complexity and uncertainty and is conducive to improved organisational performance (van Deventer & Kruger, 2011). The organisation of a school influences teachers' commitment to their teaching; it also binds staff and pupils in a common vision. Good organisation is a directive which aids in decision- making in the school and determines ideal behaviour (van Deventer & Kruger, 2011).

Weak organisational structure was one of the biggest challenges I faced as the principal of a faltering school. There were no clear policy directives to guide staff,

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pupils and parents. Record keeping and filing systems were also poor and the school timetable had not been drawn up correctly (Nieuwenhuis,2007). Any attempts to change this situation needed to take into account the complex relationships and groups on the staff shaped by rational and irrational ideas and conscious and unconscious processes (Christie, 1998). Rather than mandated by a top down approach, changing patterns of behaviour were addressed using a participative approach (Christie, 1998) where conflict resolution and team building exercises encouraged teachers to work together in examining problems (Sergiovanni, 1992).

### 2.3.3 School vision and values

Faltering schools lack a coherent vision and accompanying values that guide policy and practice (van Deventer & Kruger, 2011). The creation of a vision is not a static event because the vision changes as culture changes (van Deventer & Kruger, 2011). Creating a school vision and determining our school values was a collaborative activity among staff, learners and parents (van Deventer & Kruger, 2011). The most effective school change occurs when the school community collectively models the values and beliefs of the school (van Deventer & Kruger, 2011). A principal is more likely to develop a school culture with similar values if he/she acts with care and concern (van Deventer & Kruger, 2011). Moreover, a principal should work towards developing a shared vision that is steeped in   history, values and beliefs of what the school should be. At the same time the principal must cherish traditions, ceremonies, rituals and symbols that reinforce the vision and values of the school (van Deventer & Kruger, 2011).

The school at the centre of this research had an outdated vision and mission statement. It was given to me in the form of an aged school brochure. The school had lost its vision, its purpose; there were no clearly defined gaols to work towards (Autry, 2001). Values describe how staff relate to one another in a school as they pursue their mission to accomplish their purpose (Autry, 2001). Values had not been articulated and it was my first responsibility to guide the development of these values (Autry, 2001).

### 2.3.4 School culture and climate

The simplest way of defining school culture is 'how things are done around here' (van Deventer & Kruger, 2011). A school's culture is reflected in the underlying assumptions about what is acceptable and what is not, what behaviour and actions are encouraged and discouraged (van Deventer & Kruger, 2011). Culture is key to effective leadership and the development of a school, however it is important that the principal is sensitive to and has an understanding of the school culture before introducing development programmes (van Deventer & Kruger, 2011).

A healthy school climate is one where all members of the school community share common values, participate and contribute to decision-making and support the aims of the school (van Deventer & Kruger, 2011). A shared understanding of values and beliefs by staff, pupils and parents is a reflection of a positive school climate (van Deventer & Kruger, 2011). The establishment and maintenance of a school climate requires persistent and constant effort by the principal (van Deventer & Kruger, 2011). A positive school climate is enhanced if the school has a clear mission, well established expectations for success, if it consistently delivers quality classroom instruction, uses effective communication among all members of the school community, has strong morale, is a well-ordered and maintained environment and lastly has clearly communicated expectations of pupil behaviour which is consistently enforced and fairly applied (van Deventer & Kruger, 2011).

In the case of the school being studied, I found a school with low morale. Teachers were demotivated and could be found out of class during contact time, communication was poor and discipline not fairly and consistently applied.(Fleisch & Christie, 2004). It is true to say that in the case of a faltering school such as I experienced, instead of a focus on teaching and learning, the school was trapped in forms of conflict, there was a general apathy amongst staff and to some extent parents. The school lacked effectiveness where staff displayed anxiety, even depression and projected blame onto others (Fleisch & Christie, 2004).The school did not undertake repairs of broken windows, desks, chairs or general maintenance of the buildings (Christie, 1998) . Likewise, the Committee on the Culture of Learning

and Teaching (CCOLT) commented on complex organisational relationships that had broken down in the schools they surveyed (Christie, 1998). Interviews with stakeholders reported an absence of a purpose and a vision which resulted in demotivation of both teachers and pupils (Christie, 1998). The same interviewees indicated a lack of cooperation, respect and trust amongst stakeholders. These problems were compounded by the reluctance of most school stakeholders to recognize their respective roles and accept responsibility in dealing with institutional and structural problems (Christie, 1998).

### 2.3.5 Quality of teaching and learning

Ngware, Peter and Oketch( 2015) found that "…quality teaching constitutes effective education interventions for improving learning gains."  Creating a positive school culture has a direct bearing on the quality of teaching and learning in a school (Sergiovanni, 1992). The principal's main responsibility is to create conditions in the school in which pupils can receive quality teaching (Kruger, 2003). Reasons for poor quality teaching and learning in a faltering school could include the possibility that staff do not have the desire to teach, there could be tensions between rival educator organisations and tensions between various groups in the school community (Pretorius, 2014). Staff tend to ignore norms and internal values with respect to minimum quality and quantity of work (Pretorius, 2014). In this study there was an absence of leadership for close on two years and as a result a lack of high expectations from the principal.  A lack of monitoring led to unstructured classroom instruction by some staff  and unchallenging curriculum coverage despite the fact that classrooms were equipped with technology, outdated but still in working order.

For serious teaching and learning to take place there must be a well-established academic culture, ethos, a heathy school climate and an orderly and safe environment. The school management must ensure that the school is well equipped with suitably qualified staff and resources (Pretorius, 2014). Continuous review of teaching practices is essential for the purpose of improving the quality of teaching and learning (Pretorius, 2014).

## 2.3.6 Staff development, guidance and coaching

Continuous professional development is seen as a key component of any successful organisation in the 21st century (Hargreaves & Fink, 2006). Kraft and Papay, (2014: 476) claim that, based on their research evidence, "…teachers working in more supportive professional environments improve their effectiveness more over time than teachers working in less supportive contexts." It implies that organisations must deliberately create these development opportunities. Staff development, knowledge sharing and mentoring of new teachers was non-existent when I took over as principal. The staff received no guidance or support to enable them to teach effectively (Pretorius 2014). They were largely left to their own devices. Barth (2001) in his book *'Learning by heart'*, advocates that teachers possess a great deal of knowledge about pupils and maximizing pupil achievement yet rarely share this with one another. One way to address knowledge creation and sharing is to build a learning community (Barth, 2001). Building a professional learning community is at the heart of successful school reform (Barth, 2001; Fullan, 2001). Building a learning community means implementing programmes that will enrich the teaching experience of staff (Fullan, 2001).

Fullan suggests that while schools invest heavily in technology and training, little is done in sharing and using new knowledge (Fullan, 2001). Dufour and Eaker (1998) describe collective enquiry as the "engine of improvement, growth and renewal" in a school . When staff collaborate, they learn from one another and the momentum grows toward continued improvement (Dufour & Eaker, 1998). Fullan (2001) adds to the discourse and cites knowledge creation and sharing as a characteristic of effective leadership. If there is no compelling moral purpose, people are not likely to share knowledge. Staff may not be inclined to take the risk associated with the sharing of knowledge with colleagues without the security of strong relationships (Fullan, 2001). According to experts on organizational leadership (Sergiovanni, 1992; Maxwell, 2007), the difference between effective and ineffective leaders is how much they really care about the people they lead. Relationship building is about taking the time to understand staff and responding accordingly and individually to their personal and developmental needs (Ryan, 2007).

## 2.4 STRATEGIES TO TURN AROUND A FALTERING SCHOOL

A review of literature confirms a number of common factors that act as guidelines to assist faltering schools into becoming effective. These guidelines include having a shared vision and a focus on teaching and learning, high expectations, accountability, developing a learning community and a stimulating and secure learning environment with an emphasis on professional development ( Collins, 2001; Darling-Hammond, 1996; Fullan, 2002; Hargreaves & Fink, 2006; Maxwell, 2007; Reeves, 2009; Senge, 1999; Ryan, 2007; Sergiovanni, 1992; Wagner & Kegan, 2006).These factors are linked to the concept of a values driven school (Nieuwenhuis, 2007).

### 2.4.1 Elements required for changing the school

Teddlie and Stringfield (2007) and Sammons, Hillman and Mortimore (1995) add to the discourse further by suggesting key elements required for becoming an effective school. Literature proposes that effective and strong leadership that puts children first has a profound effect on pupil achievement (Teddlie & Stringfield, 2007). This involves the principal actively monitoring the curriculum, maintaining high visibility, providing a supportive working environment and protecting instructional time (Teddlie & Stringfield, 2007). Sammons, et al. (1995) concur that the key feature critical to the success of an effective school is that of purposeful and strong leadership by the principal. Furthermore, principals are tasked with recruiting talented, qualified staff that possesses effective subject and pedagogical knowledge (Sammons, et al., 1995; Teddlie & Stringfield, 2007). The principal is also responsible for monitoring staff performance and promoting systematic professional development involving collective and individual needs (Sammons, et al., 1995; Teddlie & Stringfield, 2007).

Critical to a school's effectiveness is a sustained focus on teaching and learning (Teddlie & Stringfield, 2007). Successful schools ensure maximisation of learning time (Sammons, Hillman, & Mortimore, 1995) and effective curriculum coverage that offers rich learning opportunities, enhancing time spent at school (Teddlie & Stringfield, 2007).

A shared vision has a positive effect on pupil and staff attitudes towards the school and consequently the principal has to consistently create an orderly, safe, positive school culture and create an attractive environment (Sammons, et al., 1995 ; Teddlie & Stringfield, 2007).

Teddlie and Stringfield (2007) point to the importance of setting high and appropriate expectations for both pupils and staff. For pupils this includes expectations for achievement and behaviour, also communicated to parents who are partners in the education process, thus building a home-school involvement (Sammons, Hillman, & Mortimore, 1995). For staff this includes expectations for participation in professional development and monitoring learners' work and achievement (Teddlie & Stringfield, 2007).

Another key factor to becoming an effective school is the use of pupil achievement data, in other words the rigorous and regular monitoring of pupil progress in order to support the needs of the pupils (Teddlie & Stringfield, 2007) . In effective schools, staff evaluate pupil data so that decisions are grounded in analysis to assist in improving performance (Teddlie & Stringfield, 2007). Effective schools have high expectations of what pupils can achieve and ensure large amounts of learning time (Sammons, Hillman, & Mortimore, 1995).

According to Teddlie and Stringfield (2007) teaching practice involves maximising the use of class time, preparing lessons in advance, clearly communicating the purpose of the lessons and what the pupils needs to do. Staff are responsible for providing a balanced and stimulating curriculum that aims to meet the needs of the pupils while setting high standards for learning (Teddlie & Stringfield, 2007). Sammons, et al. (1995) advocate further that an efficient school enjoys purposeful teaching with clarity of purpose where lessons are carefully structured and staff are able to adapt their practice to suit the needs of pupils (Sammons, Hillman, & Mortimore, 1995).

Parent involvement is the seventh factor that contributes to a school becoming effective (Teddlie & Stringfield, 2007). Involving parents in a pupil's school work can have a positive impact on a pupil's achievement. Another useful approach suggested by Teddlie and Stringfield (2007) is that of having an open door policy whereby parents assist in the classroom or on excursions and importantly staff sharing the progress of pupils with their parents (Teddlie & Stringfield, 2007).

The eighth and last factor is that of building staff skills because practical professional development opportunities are strongly correlated to a school's success (Teddlie & Stringfield, 2007). Schools involved in collective self-review, involving all staff, will find that this leads to developing new practices (Sammons, Hillman, & Mortimore, 1995). Effective schools encourage debate amongst staff about curriculum and pedagogy (Sammons, Hillman, & Mortimore, 1995) and in so doing build developmental opportunities.

## 2.4.2 Managing the change process in schools

In order to turn around a faltering school one has to examine the process of change. Reeves (2009) suggests principals must be specific and define what will not change. Values, practices, traditions, and relationships that will not be lost must be articulated. Change must be sited in the context of stability (Reeves, 2009). Fullan (2001) adds further to the discourse explaining that the goal is not to transform the most, but rather to transform selectively using logic (Fullan, 2001). The reason to transfer selectively is that the impact of change hinges on the individual characteristics of the staff, the school itself, the nature of the change and the way change is presented (Evans, 2001).

The second imperative is to recognise that organizational culture will change with leadership actions (Reeves, 2009). Principals speak most clearly with their actions. Leadership is not about issuing orders or supplying answers but rather about changing behaviour such as how decisions are made, the allocation of personal time, which meetings are accepted or declined and taking the time to understand the personal stories of staff (Reeves, 2009). If a principal's personal actions remain unchanged, the staff's hope turns to cynicism (Reeves, 2009). Fullan (2001) futhers

the argument about organizational change and leadership actions and advocates that it is not enough to have the best ideas; leaders in schools must work through a process where others assess and come to find collective meaning and commitment to new ways of doing things (Fullan, 2001).

The third component is for school leaders to appreciate early difficulties of trying something new. Implementation will not always be a smooth transition. School leaders must look at resistance as a potential positive force and look for ways in which to address negative concerns (Fullan, 2001). Reeves adds further to the discourse by saying that principals have to use the right change tools for the culture and context of the school community (Reeves, 2009). Principals must use the right combination of rituals, traditions, threats, coercion, training, procedures as well as vision and role modelling (Reeves, 2009). Specifically, principals must apply the right combination of change tools in order to change the collective behaviours and beliefs of schools, varying their strategies to meet the changing needs of the system (Reeves, 2009). The reason for choosing appropriate change tools is that the same inspiring actions viewed by some staff could be interpreted differently by other staff members depending on culture and context (Reeves, 2009). Although growth and development are synonymous with change in a school, so is grief and bereavement which a principal can overlook. It is not just the logic of change that matters but the psychological as well (Evans, 2001).

Fullan (2001) advocates the importance of reculturing as the fourth component of change .The change that is required is in the culture of what people value and how they work together to accomplish it (Fullan, 2002). A principal must avoid threatening competence. After all, staff are being asked to abandon what they know how to do and adopt something unknown. Change for example could be in practices, procedures and routines which could make staff feel insecure (Evans, 2001). Evans (2001) elaborates further by explaining that change can also bring about conflict. Every staff room contains a history of disputes, jealousies and personal hurts. Change can reopen these memories and wounds, sparking tensions and disagreements which are not necessarily about the change process but are actually old hurts (Evans, 2001).There is no checklist for reculturing but rather it involves

hard, difficult day to day work (Fullan, 2001). Reeves (2009) refers to this hard, difficult work as 'scut work' which can be described as rolling up one's sleeves and getting stuck in. The school leader demonstrates this by personal example and public actions (Reeves, 2009). Reculturing takes time and never ends which is why a school leader requires energy, enthusiasm and hope along with moral propose (Fullan, 2001).

Peter Senge (1990) aptly uses an analogy of gardening when he writes about change. He suggests that we still think of organizations as machines that can be fixed by driving change; *"We keep bringing in the mechanics – when what we need are gardeners. We keep trying to drive change – when what we need to do is to cultivate change".*

Fullan (2001) describes coherence making as a perennial pursuit, an elusive concept as the final step of understanding change. Coherence making is providing a vision in a logical and consistent way to unify an organisation (Fullan, 2001). Newmann, King and Youngs (2000) defines coherence as the extent to which the school's programmes are coordinated, focused on clear goals, and sustained over a period of time. Coherence making is part of leading in a culture of change. Change creates disequilibrium, which can be uncomfortable. Once staff start to make meaning of the change and it has coherence, new patterns may emerge. When the changes are perceived positively it creates energy, enthusiasm and generates other positive changes (Fullan, 2001).

Principals not tuned into leading a culture of change, make the mistake of seeking external innovations and take on too many projects. A cultural change principal focuses on the learners and staff but also looks for external ideas to further the thinking and vision of the school (Fullan, 2002). Overload is a natural tendency of a complex school system and as principal I am conscious of the creative potential of diverse ideas and strive to focus energy and provide clarity. Cultural change principals look to the future, preferring to create a culture that has the capacity not to settle on the solution of the day .Good effective leaders make people feel that even in the most difficult times, problems can be discussed productively (Fullan, 2002).

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Teaching traditionally attracts people into the profession for stability rather than salary. Teachers take their work personally and while these character traits are good for teaching young minds, these traits do not make it easier to manage the loss brought about by change and the potential for conflict (Evans, 2001). Therefore, to implement change it is essential to persuade staff that change is necessary and create an undertsanding of why, what and how change will take place (Evans, 2001). Evans (2001) possits further that to keep the momentum , a princiapl cannot wait until staff have overcome their grief as strategy would be lost. Buy-in must be built and the building begins with the principal making a case for change. Making a case for change means challenging staff to face realities because effective implementation begins with honest conversations (Evans, 2001). A key to building buy-in is making change inevitable as staff are inclined to adjust when change is certain (Evans, 2001). It is important then to establish collegiality or connectedness in a school which results in natural connections amongst people (Sergiovanni, 1991).

The more staff become self-managed and self-led, the more direct leadership from the principal becomes less necessary. Coherence is not about what is on paper or what school management articulate, but what is in the minds and hearts of the members of the school community. As they unfold, the processes rooted in pursuing moral purpose, the change process, new relationships and knowledge sharing create deep coherence (Fullan, 2001). However, coherence can never be completely achieved. Principals leading a culture of change value tensions inherent in addressing hard to solve problems because that is where the greatest accomplishments lie (Fullan, 2002). To nourish change, the principal must not only be committed to change but to the staff as well, showing care ,support and a commitment to work with the staff through difficult times thus helping the staff move from loss to commitment (Evans, 2001). Change can never be forced. The principal therefore has to embody change and build a bridge between the old and the new, linking as Evans (2001) explains, the future to the past and at the same time emphasising existing strengths.

While authors such as Teddlie and Stringfield (2007), Fullan (2001), Sammons, et al. (1995), Sergiovanni (1992) and Senge (1999) contribute to the literature on the characteristics necessary to become an effective functioning school, a common thread is recognised in all the factors, that of leading improvement through a values driven approach. There is a growing interest in studying values, ethics and the moral elements of educational leadership. Nieuwenhuis (2007) advocates adopting shared values to guide a school in improving its functioning. To achieve this, a values driven school involves staff, pupils and parents to identify what values the school will use as the core of its operation (Nieuwenhuis, 2007). Once an agreed framework has been developed, it must permeate all aspects of school life. Staff, pupils and parents should actively support and model shared values (Nieuwenhuis,2007). This is the heart of improving a faltering school (Sergiovanni, 1992).

### 2.4.3 Creating value driven schools

The argument for a values driven approach in schools is as old as education itself (Lickona, 1991) and its history can be traced back to philosophers such as Aristotle, Socrates and Plato (Nieuwenhuis 2008). Although the values debate in education has a long standing history, it continues as educationalists and decision makers grapple with issues of human rights, moral decay, a lack of school discipline and a breakdown in the culture of learning and teaching in schools (Christie, 1998; Nieuwenhuis,2008). Nakra (2005) contends that on one hand we have made unparalleled advances in the field of technology but that conversely we are witnessing a high degree of decay and disintegration of extrinsic and intrinsic values in schools.

Ramphele (2012) adds a South African perspective for a values driven approach in schools when she debates that the moral gap between the values system we committed ourselves to when we became a democracy some twenty years back, and our actual day to day practices, needs to be closed. United Nations Secretary-General (Ki - Moon, 2012) in *Global Education First Initiative*, expounds the idea of values driven education further by advocating that schools have an opportunity of contributing positively to fixing society by playing an effective role in cultivating an active care for the world and its citizens.

I concur with Buckingham and Coffman (1999) that education is not about how much one can change a person but rather about how much one can draw out and develop that which is already within that person. Nieuwenhuis (2007) takes the argument to its logical conclusion advocating that only when we decide to change from within will real change occur where people actively strive for a just society.

Tolerance, respect and understanding are a hallmark of a values driven school where the dignity and identity of every individual is valued and where an individual's capacity to achieve is considered important (Nieuwenhuis,2008). Not only is self-dignity and self-confidence an essential basis for personal development and progress in a values driven school  but  it is also required for collaboration and to embrace and accept change (Nieuwenhuis, 2007). A values driven school develops autonomy and responsibility essential for reflective thinking. Ultimately a values driven school assists the school community to acknowledge their dependence on society and encourages pupils, staff and parents to contribute to society (Nieuwenhuis, 2007).

Nieuwenhuis (2007) concurs with Senge (1999) and  delves further into the disocurse  and suggests that values driven schools build communities of leaders and learners where more learning takes place through continually creating and sharing new knowledge. Sergiovanni (1999) classifies virtuous or values laden schools as communities of learners who have the capacity to improve themselves because the conditions are right where staff and learners alike learn. Learning by one adds to the learning of others so creating a learning community where there is an improvement in the school culture. Barth in (Sergiovanni 1992: 125) argues that the principal in a community of learners need no longer be the instructional leader, pretending to have all the answers but rather that the critical role of the principal is as head learner, celebrating, displaying, experiencing  and modelling what is hoped and expected of teachers and pupils (Sergiovanni, 1992).

Sergiovanni (2000) advocates further that the most important quality in an effective school is its character and that school character is linked to school effectiveness.

Adding value not only contributes to the development of human capital but in particular to social capital too (Sergiovanni, 2000). Social capital consists of obligations, norms, and trusts that are created by relationships (Sergiovanni, 2000). When the school community has access to social capital, they find the support they need for learning. When social capital is not available however, discipline problems arise because pupils generate a culture themselves by turning more and more to pupil subculture for support. This frequently results in codes of behaviour that work against what the school is trying to achieve (Sergiovanni, 1999).

A school that is strong on building a sense of community provides opportunities for social capital to emerge. Key to building community is connections, and key to connections is personal commitment (Sergiovanni, 1999). Lickona (1991:6) sums up the vision of education in a values driven school succinctly when he writes: "They have educated for character as well as intellect, decency as well as literacy, virtue as well as knowledge".

## 2.5 MORAL REGENERATION IN LEADERSHIP PRACTICES

Leadership is as old as time and has its roots in the beginning of civilization (Stone & Patterson, 2005). Egyptian rulers, Greek heroes, and biblical patriarchs all have one thing in common – leadership (Stone & Patterson, 2005). There have been various insights on leadership through the ages but the last thirty five years has seen the rise and fall of many models of leadership: transactional leadership, transformational leadership, charismatic leadership, authentic leadership, autocratic leadership, steward leadership, servant leadership, collaborative leadership and laissez–faire leadership (Rhode, 2006; van Deventer & Kruger, 2011). Since the early nineteen hundreds there have been thousands of empirical investigations and studies about leaders and leadership (Bennis & Nanus, 1985) yet little has traditionally focused on moral based leadership. From this explanation one can deduce that numerous studies focus on leadership but little research exists on moral based leadership.

There is, however, a growing interest in studying values, ethics and the moral elements of educational leadership (Greenfield, 2004). Sergiovanni (1992) in his

book *Moral leadership; getting to the heart of school improvement* suggests that leadership is not a magic solution for increasing school development. Although important, it is the kind and quality of leadership that will help determine school improvement. Sergiovanni (1992) contends further that leadership has become little more than a buzzword and that moral authority is missing as the hand of leadership has been separated from its head and its heart (Sergiovanni, 1992). In trying to understand what drives leadership, bureaucratic, psychological and technical-rational authority have been over emphasized, seriously disregarding moral and professional authority (Miller, 2002). The leadership style adopted by a principal can have a positive or negative effect on school development (van Deventer & Kruger, 2011).

Although there are currently many theories on leadership that influence education, as the principal of a school, I cannot work with all these approaches and theories. I rather choose an approach that resonates deeply within me, an authentic style of leadership that comes from the heart of my upbringing. I am compelled to live my life in this way and be true to myself. Being true to me means being true to my uniqueness and this is something only I can express. If I am not true to myself, I miss the point of my life; I miss what being human is to me (West-Burnham, 2009), a desire to serve (Greenleaf, 1977). I choose to adopt a leadership style that is based on moral authority, that of servant leadership. Perhaps it is best to start the discourse on servant leadership by first exploring the relationship between the concepts of ethics, values and morals.

## 2.6 THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ETHICS, VALUES AND MORALS

Ethics is an all embracing term used to describe human conduct (Nieuwenhuis, 2011b) and theories of human behaviour (West-Burnham, 2009). Knights ( n.d.) describes ethics as acting in a way that is consistent with one's own principles and values, characterised by honest, fairness and equity in all interpersonal activities. Ethics is a philosophical debate in which theories and standards of behaviour are validated. All the world's great faiths have an ethical system ( West-Burnham, 2009). Values refer to personal standards about what is worth striving or living for (Nieuwenhuis,2007). West-Burnham (2009) describes values as an expression of an

ethical system for a particular time and place. Morals then refer to personal values in action. Knights (n.d.) advocates that ethical behaviour is of a higher order than moral behaviour. A leader operating in any culture might accept what is morally correct but it might not be the ethical view of that leader. Although the terms ethics, values and morals are not equivalent in meaning they are inextricably linked and are best described as an ethical understanding that is translated into a value system based on personal constructs which then informs moral behaviour (West-Burnham, 2009).

## 2.7 WHAT IS MORAL BASED LEADERSHIP?

Sergiovanni (1992) is of the opinion that leadership practice is failing in schools because it is viewed as a behaviour, as something psychological where professional and moral authority have been neglected.  The result is that there is an "emphasis on doing things right at the expense of doing the right thing" (Sergiovanni, 1992: 4). Instead, leadership should focus on people's actions, on spirituality and ideas (Sergiovanni 1992). To illustrate his argument Sergiovanni (1992) uses the analogy of the head, heart, and hand when he writes that the reason for leadership practice failing in schools is that the hand of leadership has been separated from its head and heart (Sergiovanni, 1992). The heart of leadership has to do with a person's personal vision - what a person believes values and dreams about and is committed to (Wallace, Ridenour and Biddle, 1999). The head of leadership describes the practices that leaders develop over time and their ability to reflect on the situations they face (Sergiovanni, 1991). Reflection, attitude, personal vision and values become the basis for decision- making in moral based leadership. Summed up aptly; the head of leadership is shaped by the heart and drives the hand (Sergiovanni, 1991).

West-Burnham (2009) concurs with Sergiovanni that morally based leadership is a behaviour that is consistent with organisational and personal values derived from a coherent ethical system. Rhode (2006) adds further to the discourse advocating that moral based leadership brings ethics into all organizational activites. Practically implemented, this means factoring moral considerations into all day to day functions in a school. Moral based leadership is a style that recognizes the importance of values and attitudes in decision making (Senge, 1999). Sergiovanni (1992) explains

moral leadership as taking any action in the belief that it is right, from duty to the best interest of a school not because of personal inclination or gain.

Greenfield (2004) helps us to understand that morally based  leadership in schools brings members of a community together around common purposes in a way that entails using deliberate moral conduct toward others and oneself which strives to meet the needs of adults and children (Greenfield, 2004). For the purposes of this research study, I tend to lean towards Foster (1986) who argues that the field of moral leadership would benefit from engaging in on-going critique whereby leaders themselves become more reflective and critical of schooling and leadership practices. Foster adds much to the dialogue about the moral scope of the work of the school leader reinforcing the idea that the school leader has a special duty to improve the institution of schooling so that it is more just and equitable (Foster, 1986).

Leaders set the moral tone and moral example through their own behaviour. Teachers take their cue about appropriate behaviour from those in leadership capacities (Foster, 1986). Consistency between words and actions is most important in conveying a moral message. I like the words of Greenfield (2004) that if a principal wants to lead, he or she must express that leadership by translating it into actions and attitudes. Moral leadership has the potential to transform a school into a community inspired by commitment, devotion and service (Sergiovanni, 1992). Knights (n.d.) suggests that the ethic of respect, service, honesty and justice are easier said than done. To actually live these principles as a moral leadership, one needs to operate beyond one's own ego and put others first (Knights). During the 20th century and even earlier, organisations were able to hide their unethical behaviour but with the development of the age of information, misdeeds in organisations, governments and schools are coming to light (Knights). There is a growing realisation that a fundamental change to moral leadership is required (Knights).

From my perspective as a principal, I acknowledge that there is a place from time to time to use direct leadership, where one has to be forceful, decisive and manipulate

people and events but this is only part of the story that is leadership (Sergiovanni, 1992). My experience is that the leadership that counts is the kind that touches people, taps into their emotions, appeals to their values, and staff who respond to the relationships  of their colleagues (Sergiovanni, 1992) thus servant leadership for me has been my guiding philosophy, the quiet revolution in turning around a faltering school (Spears & Lawrence, 2004). Although an auto-ethnographic study, this research is not about me, it is about my staff. They get the credit for without them, my most treasured resource, we would remain a faltering school. Perhaps though , I can claim the same victory as the staff's success.


## 2.8 SERVANT LEADERSHIP

The essence of servant leadership can be found in the book of Matthew in the New Testament, where Jesus makes a definitive statement that anyone who wishes to be the leader must first be the servant (Hunter, 2004). Jesus was not talking about leading with power; he was talking about leading with authority. He was saying that if you want to influence people then you must serve (Hunter, 2004). Influence is built upon service and sacrifice (Hunter, 2004). Robert Greenleaf (1977) first coined the term servant-leadership in the 1970s but his thinking came a decade before that when he read Hermann Hesse's novel *Journey to the East* - a mythical journey of a group of people on a spiritual quest (Greenleaf, 1977). Greenleaf (1977), after reading the story, concluded  that the central meaning of it was that the great leader is first experienced as a servant to others and that that fact is central to the leader's greatness (Spears & Lawrence, 2004). For Greenleaf (1977), the natural feeling of wanting to serve then brings one to aspire to lead.  The difference manifests itself in the care taken by the servant to make sure that other people's highest priority needs are served (Spears & Lawrence, 2004).  Apart from serving others, the leader more importantly must serve the values that shape the school (Sergiovanni, 1992). I concur with Autry (2001) that a principal who practices servant leadership will be rewarded with emotional, psychological and spiritual fulfilment, not only for themselves but for all staff involved (Autry, 2001). Wood ( 2017) also argues that past research has found that servant leaders positively impacted on employee

retention in public and private sector organizations. By supporting the needs of my staff, I have the capacity to influence and make changes at school ( Wood, 2017).

Spears & Lawrence (2004) after considering Greenleaf's servant leadership (1977) translated Greenleaf's writings into ten characteristics fundamental to the development of servant leaders (Wood, 2017).

- Listening: Leaders are valued for their communication and decision-making skills. For the servant-leader, communication skills need to be reinforced by a deep commitment to listening intently to others (Spears & Lawrence, 2004). Listening empathetically is a characteristic of a servant leader (Wood, 2017). Hunter (2004) describes listening as an atitude toward people. The servant-leader seeks to develop a desire to hear staff out, better understand them and in so doing to learn something new (Hunter, 2004). Listening, linked with reflection, is crucial to the growth of the servant-leader (Spears & Lawrence, 2004).

- Empathy: The servant-leader strives to empathize and understand others. Staff need to be accepted and acknowledged for their individual, unique spirit (Spears & Lawrence, 2004). According to experts on organizational leadership (Sergiovanni, 1992; Maxwell, 2007), the differences between effective and ineffective leaders are how much they really care about the people they lead. Relationship building is about taking the time to understand staff and responding accordingly and individually (Ryan, 2007).

- Healing and forgiveness: One of the strengths of servant-leadership is the potential for healing one's self and others. Many people have broken spirits and have suffered from a variety of emotional hurts (Hunter, 2004; Wood, 2017). Although this is part of being human, servant-leaders recognize that they also have an opportunity to 'help make whole' those with whom they come in contact (Spears & Lawrence, 2004). Staff are going to let one another down and make mistakes (Hunter, 2004).The servant- leader has to let go of resentment. Forgiveness can be a difficult skill to develop especially when

pride and feelings are hurt (Hunter, 2004). Forgiveness however is a quality that can be developed with courage and practice while healing is the willingness and commitment to change (Hunter, 2004).

- Awareness: A strength of servant leadership is general and especially self-awareness (Wood, 2017). Awareness aids one in understanding issues involving ethics, power and values which assist in being able to view most situations from a more holistic integrated position (Spears & Lawrence, 2004).

- Persuasion**:** According to Spears & Lawrence ( 2004) servant leaders do not use their positional power to garner support (Wood, 2017). The servant-leader seeks to convince others rather than coerce compliance (Spears & Lawrence, 2004). The servant-leader is effective at building consensus within groups (Spears & Lawrence, 2004). Furthermore, Hunter (2004) explains that servant-leadership is persuading staff to contribute their creativity, excellence, hearts, minds, and spirits and to give their best. Servant-leadership involves getting people from the neck up (Hunter, 2004).

- Conceptualization**:** Servant-leaders dream great dreams. The ability to look at a problem from a conceptualizing perspective means that one must think beyond day-to-day realities (Spears & Lawrence, 2004), current problems and short term goals (Wood, 2017). A servant leader needs to have vision and a grasp of the big picture.

- Foresight: Foresight is essential if the servant leader is to accomplish the vision of the school (Wood, 2017). Foresight is a characteristic that enables the servant-leader to understand the lessons from the past, the realities of the present, and the likely consequence of a decision for the future (Spears &Lawrence, 2004). A principal needs foresight to proactively deal with possible problems that might arise in the school setting        .

- Stewardship: A servant leader  who is committed to stewardship means he/she is accountable (Wood, 2017) and has an insider's perspective of

everything that happens in the school that could impact on the vision (Fullan, 2001; Williams & Richardson, 2010). Stewardship is first and foremost a commitment to serving the needs of others. Stewardship is primarily an act of trust whereby the servant-leader is entrusted with certain duties and obligations to fulfil and perform on behalf of the school community (Sergiovanni,1992). Sergiovanni (1992) elaborates further when he writes that a servant-leader in a school has a personal responsibility to manage his or her life with proper regard for the rights of others and for the common welfare.

- Commitment to the growth of people: Servant-leaders believe that people have an intrinsic value beyond their tangible contributions (Spears & Lawrence, 2004). As a result, the servant-leader is deeply committed to the growth of each and every individual within the institution ensuring each individual is nurtured (Wood, 2017). Servant-leaders encourage others to grow through their willingness to share their experiences, vulnerabilities and knowledge and are a constant, positive influence to those around them (Hunter, 2004).

- Building community: The servant-leader seeks to build a community among those who work within their organisation (Spears & Lawrence, 2004).

The concept of servant leadership has resulted in a host of different characteristics from numerous authors. Hunter identifies six characteristics of servant leadership which work interchangeably with each other: patience, kindness, humility, respect, selflessness and forgiveness (Hunter, 2004). Without control over desires, moods and urges, the servant-leader has little hope of behaving with character in difficult situations (Hunter, 2004). Kindness and courtesy means servant-leader relationships will flow smoothly. Humility means servant-leaders give credit to others and do not seek adulation for themselves (Hunter, 2004). Respect means servant-leaders understand that everyone is important and adds value to the school (Hunter, 2004). Selflessness means the servant-leader sets aside personal wants and needs in

seeking the greatest good for others. Forgiveness requires the servant-leader to let go of hurt and resentment (Hunter, 2004).

Liden, Wayne and Zhao (2008) define a servant leader as one who brings out the best in their staff and one who relies on one-to-one communication to undertsand the desires, potential, abilities and goals of each staff member in the school. Patterson's (2003) model of servant leadership is an extension of earlier transformational leadership theories (Carroll & Patterson, 2014). The difference between the two theories is that transformational leaders focus on the school's needs, whereas servant leaders focus on the needs of their staff (Carroll & Patterson, 2014). According to Patterson, the definition of servant leadership is one who serves with a focus on the staff who are the primary concern (Carroll & Patterson, 2014). Constructs of the servant-leader are virtues defined as moral excellence and quality in a person. Patterson's extends current literature and includes the following six characteristics of a servant-leader: someone who leads and serves with love and humility, is trusting, is unselfish, is a visionary, is serving and empowers staff (Carroll & Patterson, 2014). Although I am immersed in the world of servant-leadership, I know that I am certainly not where I want to be as a principal , but I do know that I am further along the journey than I was five years ago (Hunter, 2004).
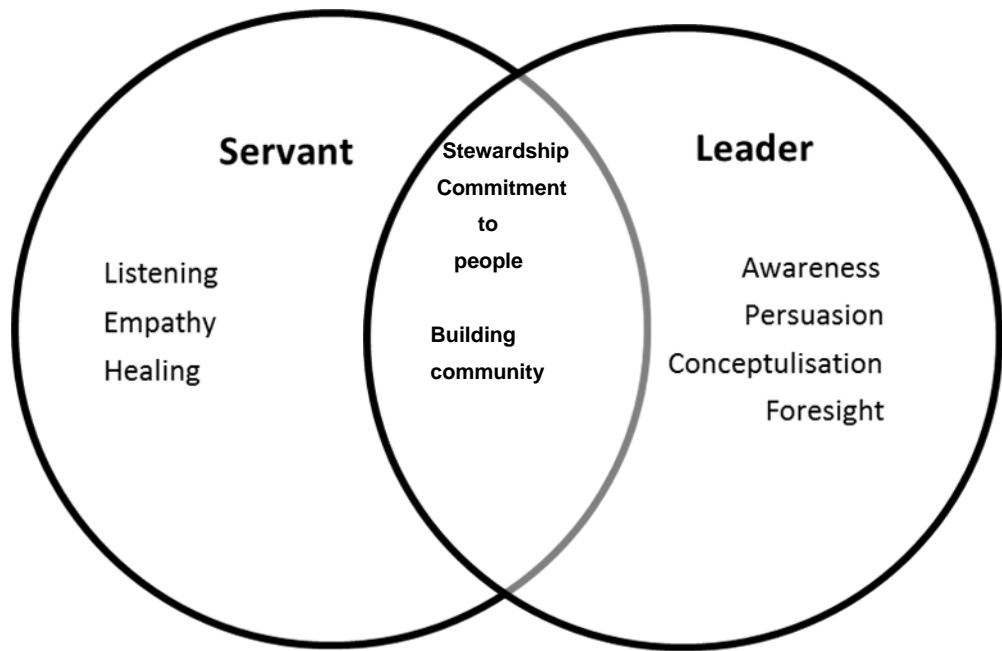
**Figure 1. The relationship between servant and leadership**

This diagram depicts two dimensions of servant and leader incorporating Spear's ten characteristics and the relationship between them extracted from Greenleaf's writing (Spears & Lawrence, 2004) adapted from Benjamin Lichtenwalner's presentation: 'An Introduction to the Power of Leadership through Service' (Lichtenwalner, 2008).

The word servant and leader are usually thought of as being opposites. A paradox emerges when two opposites are brought together (Spears & Lawrence, 2004). Paradoxes are not always easy to balance but the poem by Brewer (in Hansel, 1989) offers an insight into the paradoxical idea of servant- leadership.

Strong enough to be weak

Successful enough to fail

Busy enough to make time

Wise enough to say "I don't know "

Serious enough to laugh

Rich enough to be poor

Right enough to say "I'm wrong"

Compassionate enough to discipline

Mature enough to be childlike

Important enough to be last

Planned enough to be spontaneous

Controlled enough to be flexible

Free enough to endure captivity

Knowledgeable enough to ask questions

Loving enough to be angry

Great enough to be anonymous

Responsible enough to play

Assured enough to be rejected

Victorious enough to lose

Industrious enough to relax

Leading enough to serve

(Hansel, 1989).

Servant-leadership is a long term transformational approach to work and life, it is a way of being that has the potential for creating positive change in a school (Spears & Lawrence, 2004). The simple truth is that leadership and life are about people and relationships (Hunter, 2004; Fullan, 2001).

## 2.9 ESTABLISHING A LEARNING SCHOOL USING THE LENS OF NIEUWENHUIS' THEORETICAL MODEL

The dilemma I faced on taking up my position as principal was the difficulty of effecting change and the way to do it. In order to turn a largely faltering school culture into a successful educational functioning and sustainable one, I required a comprehensive understanding of a values driven school environment. This study's theoretical model supports the rationale of developing a policy structure through the establishment of values synonymous with a learning school culture.

### 2.9.1 Definition of a learning school

A learning school can be classified as one where interaction is focused on learning with the aim of achieving specific outcomes (Nieuwenhuis,2007). Although a learning school environment supports, facilitates and promotes quality teaching and learning, it has a values-based climate that fosters fairness and respect for others (Nieuwenhuis, 2007). Nieuwenhuis' (2007) framework of a learning school incorporates four important elements, namely: its focus, the principles that guide it, its support base and interaction in the classroom.

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┌─────────────────────────────────┐
│           PRINCIPLES            │
│  Mutually agree upon values that │
│  serve the school and community │
│  Legal an   and   policy        │
│  frameworks                     │
└─────────────────────────────────┘
                │
                ▼
┌──────────────────────────────────────────┐        ┌─────────────────────┐
│ TEACHING AND LEARNING SITUATIONS ENABLE   │        │        FOCUS        │
│ CONSTRUCTION OF KNOWLEDGE THROUGH:        │   ──▶   │ Learning outcomes,  │
│     Being learner centred                 │        │ the mission and     │
│     Learners are active participants      │        │ vision of the school│
│     Integrate learner experiences with    │        └─────────────────────┘
│     learning content                      │
│     Positive Assessment                   │
└──────────────────────────────────────────┘
                ▲
                │
┌──────────────────────────────────────────┐
│ SUPPORTED BY STRONG DEMOCRATIC            │
│ PRACTICES THAT ENSURE PARENTAL AND        │
│ COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT IN:                 │
│ The educative practices of the school     │
│ Aiding school management teams            │
│ Creating a democratic school and community culture │
│ Establishing a well-developed human rights culture in the │
│ community                                 │
│ Ensuring community accountability and responsibility │
└──────────────────────────────────────────┘
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**Figure 2. Illustration of the dynamics of a learning school (Nieuwenhuis,2007)**

**2.9.2 Focus**

A learning school has a clearly defined vision and purpose rooted in collectively agreed values. There is a focus on learning outcomes as well as the vision and mission of the school (Nieuwenhuis, 2007). Peter Senge in his book, *The Fifth Discipline* (1999) describes the presumptions and generalizations people have which influence their actions, as mental models. Mental models are lenses through which people see their reality. To change their mental models is to have staff reflect on their own behaviour and beliefs. A principal needs some understanding of these

mental models, where underlying assumptions are brought to the surface, before building a vision for the school (Senge, 1999).

Although learning schools are guided and directed by the values they uphold and the policy frameworks they develop, the values of a learning school are derived from the Constitution of South Africa as well as from the community within which the school is situated (Nieuwenhuis, 2007). A learning school has clear values and a clear purpose of what it is trying to achieve, an understanding of why those are its goals and how it plans on reaching these shared goals (Nieuwenhuis, 2007). The focus is captured in the learning school's vison and mission statements, articulates with and is aligned to the learning outcomes of the school (Nieuwenhuis, 2007). The biggest challenge is for the school community to live and advance these values in all spheres of communal life. A learning school then becomes a dynamic and changing institution once policies and values are part of its operation (Nieuwenhuis,2007).

Senge (1999) adds further to the role of a principal in a learning school as cultivating a meaningful shared vision amongst pupils, staff and parents and thus ensuring a common sense of direction. When the vision is authentic and shared, staff will automatically participate in the improvement processes to get the school closer to accomplishing its vision (Senge, 1999). The learning school believes that in order to reach its full potential, it must become a learning community. Therefore the focus is to develop a spirit of curiosity, inquiry and reflection that touches staff and pupils alike (Sergiovanni, 1992).

### 2.9.3 Principles that guide a learning school

Newmann, King and Youngs (2000) and Nieuwenhuis (2007) concur that professional development ought to address all aspects of capacity to advance knowledge building and the collective work of the school.

Tied into school development is moral purpose and passion which I recognise as necessary to be an effective principal (Fullan, 2001). My explicit moral purpose is to make a difference (Fullan, 2001). Moral purpose can be difficult in a school environment because of different ideas and cultures that people bring to the school

community, however, the culture and core values are the glue that holds the school together (Fullan, 2001). Authentic leaders have a distinctive style, have values, ideals and purpose and are morally diligent in advancing staff development opportunities (Fullan, 2001). Knowledge creation and sharing is central to effective leadership. Staff members sharing knowledge with one another ensures continuous growth for all. Sharing information however requires that staff listen to each other and listening depends on good relationships within the school (Fullan, 2002). The assessment of staff development can be measured by the extent to which it awakens the intrinsic commitment of others - it mobilizes the school community's sense of moral purpose (Fullan, 2001).

A key strategy for change in a faltering school is to rethink teacher development and involve teachers in research and knowledge building (Darling-Hammond, 1996). Staff development should be characterized by the use of an effective problem-based approach that is built into on-going work with colleagues and not a once-off workshop (Darling-Hammond, 1996). School improvement calls for opportunities for collaborative enquiry and learning. This can be done through sharing insight and experience of best practice developed by excellent teachers across the staff. Investing in staff development is a strategic investment in teacher competence and is a clear sign of working towards whole school improvement (Darling-Hammond, 1996). Furthermore, policymakers are realizing that regulations cannot change schools but teachers in collaboration can (Darling-Hammond, 1996). Glickman (1991) supports this claim when he writes of elite schools not as schools that are necessarily rich but schools where staff members share ideas, responsibilities and decisions. Principals of elite schools do not pay lip service by just listening to suggestions of the staff; they are truly engaged with staff as co-equals in real decisions.

Given a supportive climate, professional development can be a catalyst for effective change in a school (Fullan, 2001). Senge (1999) refers to staff development as team learning and when this exists there is a flow of information and feedback is freely given and valued. Team learning ensures an atmosphere where people are able to harness a deeper synergy.

### 2.9.4 The support base of a learning school

Historically principals were good managers having little to do with leadership and more to do with unlocking doors and managing routines (Humada- Ludeke, 2013), however this role has been redefined and the principal is now expected to provide and create a supportive culture where staff share challenges and successes in a way that is mindful of effective and ineffective classroom practice. In so doing, teaching and learning is improved (Humada- Ludeke, 2013).

A learning school sees itself as publically accountable to the local community for the service it renders to the pupils. The staff and parents see themselves as accountable for the example they set for the pupils (Nieuwenhuis, 2007). Developing a positive school discipline policy and code of conduct that supports shared values is possible after the value framework has been established. The purpose of these polices is to foster a school climate of fairness and respect for others (Nieuwenhuis, 2007).

By being fair, genuine, hardworking, caring and good listeners, staff earn the respect of the school community. Through communicating clearly, consistently and sincerely, staff communicate their commitment and high expectations of their pupils (Nieuwenhuis, 2007). A theme that runs through literature about a learning school is one of moral purpose. Whatever one's style, every school principal must have and work on his or her moral purpose. In addition to making a difference in the lives of the learners we teach, moral purpose plays a bigger role in transforming and sustaining school change (Fullan, 2002). Within the school context, how the principal treats others is also an element of moral purpose (Fullan, 2002). Sergiovanni (1992) affiims Fullan's view  that all members of the school community be treated with the same equality, dignity and fair play.  On a broader level, moral purpose means acting with the intention of making a difference in the school environment. (Sergiovanni, 1992). As principal of a learning school, my moral purpose would permeate how I treat children, teachers, parents and others in our school community. I do believe that human beings have an innate moral sense of what is right and wrong and a conscience that guides us which competes with other senses of desires and temptations natural to human beings (Hunter, 2004). The question is, do principals

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have the will to do the right thing? The answer might lie in developing *"moral muscle, its name is character"* (Hunter, 2004:140)*.*

The school at which I am principal had to be rescued from chaos as it was in a crisis. In order to do this, radical change was required. This entailed me welcoming differences, communicating the urgency of the challenges and talking about broad possibilities in an inviting way that motivated staff (Fullan, 2001). This strategy was an immediate intervention. However in the long term, the effectiveness of change hinged on developing internal commitment whereby intrinsic motivation and ideas are harnessed by the majority of staff (Fullan, 2001).

While most school leaders work hard, have good intentions and initiatives to make changes to meet the needs of the school community, what is required is a sharpened capacity for principals in schools to learn how to take action effectively to help a school actually become what it needs and wants to be (Wagner & Kegan, 2006). Leaders in schools require a deep understanding of how difficult it is for individuals to change even when the intention is to do so. Leaders themselves need to take effective action to become the persons they want to be and the persons who are needed to better serve the school community (Wagner & Kegan, 2006). It is the responsibility of the principals to understand and bring together the challenges of both individual and organizational change to successfully lead improvement processes in schools (Reeves, 2009).

### 2.9.5 Interaction in the classroom

Firstly a learning school places importance on its relationship with and the involvement of the pupils. Interactions between staff and pupils should reflect how the agreed values are lived (Nieuwenhuis,2007). Similarly Sergiovanni (1992) discusses the virtues of a learning school where the staff are respected for their professional commitment and their knowledge of education. Teachers respond to such acknowledgement by accepting responsibility for conducting themselves in accordance with professional ideals. The learning school respects pupils giving them the same consideration given to teachers and parents. This result is a pattern of

mutual respect that increases the likelihood that teachers and pupils will respect themselves (Sergiovanni, 1992).

Establishing moral purpose in a school setting is priority one for the school leader while establishing relationships with pupils is priority two because without relationships not much learning can take place. (Fullan, 2001). Fullan emphasizes the importance of developing school capacity when he writes, *"It is the interactions and relationships among people, not the people themselves that make the difference in an organizational succes*s" (2002:51). According to experts on organizational leadership (Sergiovanni, 1992; Maxwell, 2007), the difference between effective and ineffective staff is how much they really care about the people they lead. Relationship building is about taking the time to understand pupils and to respond accordingly (Ryan, 2007).

Maslow believes that several factors need to be met before relationship building can take place (van Deventer & Kruger, 2011). Maslow's model arranges human needs into five categories of importance. Staff have the responsibility of meeting physiological and safety needs in a school before the pupils develop acceptance and understanding of others (van Deventer & Kruger, 2011). Only then can the staff progress further and develop the next level of needs, that of the self-esteem of pupils This includes boosting self confidence in pupils while establishing relationships, recognizing and appreciating pupils' achievements which results in the highest level of Maslow's hierarchy where self-actualization sees the achievement of a pupils' potential to be his/her true, unique self (van Deventer & Kruger, 2011). Maslow illustrates that five fundamental needs shape human motivation and have consequences for learning and development (van Deventer & Kruger, 2011).

Goleman (1998) adds further to the discourse of relationship building in complex times in a school with his concept of emotional intelligence being more important than having the best ideas. Goleman (1998) defines emotional intelligence  as not only  having an understanding  of one's own feelings but empathy for the feelings of others and  being able to  regulate human emotions in a way that it enhances life and living. Hunter (2004) adds a simpler explanation of emotional intelligence which

he describes as character. Character can be developed throughout life by a process referred to as maturity.

Effective teaching practices in the classroom should make provision for active learning within a pupil-centred curriculum where provision is made for positive assessment. Effective learning should be a process that engages the pupil's interests and relates to his/her experience. Importantly staff need to be conscious of the fact that knowing how to learn is more important than memorising facts. It is necessary to guide learners to reflect on their self-assessment in a meaningful way in order to evaluate their own progress where the emphasis is on individual development (Nieuwenhuis, 2007).

A comprehensive pupil centred curriculum should be carefully designed and organised to achieve the objectives of active learning and in so doing developing individual capabilities in the classroom which relate to the social, cultural and practical life in the community (Nieuwenhuis, 2007).

The progress of pupils should be monitored and assessed, staff recognising achievement and encouraging pupils to realise their potential and abilities. Positive feedback motivates and supports pupils to achieve. Assessment therefore, must be done within a caring and supportive environment built around a staff member's knowledge and understanding of  a pupil and his/her abilities (2007).

## 2.10 CONCLUSION

One may conclude that changing a school into a learning school requires re-energising, re-inventing, renewal and re–invigorating the whole school into a dynamic environment in which the pupils, staff and parents thrive in genuine inquiry (Beatty, 2007) .  If a school is to experience renewal, the school community needs to redefine purposes and process together.  This can only be done through sincere and honest collaboration (Beatty, 2007).

This literature review also discussed the work of Nieuwenhuis (2007) and Robert Greenleaf (Greenleaf, 1977). Nieuwenhuis' (2007) study provided the theoretical framework for this study. The four core elements of a learning school are its focus, the principles that guide it, its support base and the interaction in the classroom (Nieuwenhuis, 2007). This review identified a need for further research into the role of a principal turning a faltering school back into being fully functional again. Although there have been several studies on school reform, few appear to have touched on the personal lived experiences of a school principal. An auto-ethnography narrative inquiry is needed to provide a different viewpoint not found in existing literature into the role of the principal in turning around a faltering school culture. Auto-ethnography will provide an emic perspective, an account to evoke emotion, foster understanding to bring about action and change in a school.

# CHAPTER THREE

# RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND DESIGN

## 3.1 INTRODUCTION

The purpose of chapter 3 is to provide an overview of the research approach used in this study. As was already indicated in chapter 1, the study will be premised on auto-ethnography. In this chapter, the choice of auto-ethnography will be discussed from its paradigmatic basis focusing on the interpretivist underpinning that will be used. I will also discuss the process of selecting participants who can shed light on my auto-ethnography narrative, as well as data gathering instruments and my data analysis strategy. The chapter will conclude with apparency, transferability and verisimilitude criteria used and ethical considerations.

This study is guided by the question of what processes and approaches were used in turning around a dysfunctional school to becoming fully functional again?

## 3.2 WHY AUTO-ETHNOGRAPHY?

There appears to be no agreed set of definitions of auto-ethnography, however, Delamont (2009) suggests that auto-ethnography is about things that matter a great deal to the auto-ethnographer. Many different meanings and applications of auto-ethnography have evolved over the last twenty years which makes a precise definition difficult (Ellis & Bochner, 2002; Hughes, Pennington, & Makris, 2012). Ellis, Adams and Bochner (2011) use Rorty's words, that different views of auto-ethnography are "not issue(s) to be resolved, only" instead they are "difference(s) to be lived with" (Rorty, 1982:197). In furthering the discourse there is also some disagreement around which aspects of auto-ethnography deserve the greater emphasis. Auto-ethnographers can vary along the auto-ethnographic continuum between art and scientific analysis (Ellis & Bochner, 2002). Where the researcher finds him/herself along the continuum is subject to change according to the writing project and the goals of the researcher. Auto-ethnographers view research and writing as socially just acts, rather than an obsession with accuracy where  the goal

is to produce analytical, accessible texts that change us and the world we live in for the better  (Ellis, Adams, &  Bochner, 2011).

For the purposes of this study, I lean towards Denzin  and  Lincoln, (2011) who outline important features of auto-ethnography which is interchangeable with narrative inquiry. Auto-ethnography is an autobiographical, self-focused genre of writing that displays multiple layers of consciousness where the researcher becomes the phenomenon under investigation (Ellis & Bochner, 2002; Hughes, Pennington, & Makris, 2012). While acknowledging that auto-ethnography can be approached with different focuses, I adhere to a back-and-forth movement between experiencing and examining a vulnerable self and observing and revealing the broader context of that experience (Ellis & Bochner, 2002). In my backwards and forwards gaze, I focus first on social aspects of a personal experience then look inwards, exposing a vulnerable self (Ellis & Bochner, 2002). Ngunjiri, Hernandez, and Chang (2010) concur with Ellis and Bochner (2002) that auto-ethnography provides access to sensitive and inner-thoughts which makes the research method a powerful tool for individual and social understanding. Auto-ethnography in this research is a rational method of self-reflexive, ongoing inquiry about school reform. Foley (2002) advocates that auto-ethnographies, being more engaging and having a common genre, could contribute to bridging the gap between researchers and ordinary people. As Bochner and Ellis (2002) suggest, auto-ethnographers do not want readers to sit back as spectators reading a narrative but rather they want readers to get a real sense of feeling, desire and care.

Narrative ethnography refers to writing presented in the form of stories that incorporate the ethnographer's experience into the ethnographic descriptions and analysis of others (Ellis, Adams, & . Bochner, 2011.) Narrative is the study of the ways in which people experience the world. Narrative inquiry is increasingly used in educational experience (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). It draws upon Dewey's emphasis on lived experience and was first applied to educational research by Connelly  and  Clandinin in  1990 (Dewey, 1933). Narrative enquires are attuned to the feelings, desires, needs, aesthetic reactions and moral dispositions of self and others (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990).

People by nature lead storied lives and as a narrative researcher I have collected stories of my experiences in turning around a faltering school culture and then written of my experiences (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). I start with my personal life where I pay attention to my feelings, thoughts and emotions. Ellis and Bochner (2002) refer to this as systematic sociological introspection and emotional recall, trying to understand the experiences I have lived through. This auto-ethnography narrative has generated fear, doubt and vulnerability about revealing me and not being able to take back what I have written or having control over how readers interpret it. It is difficult to feel that not only is my research being critiqued but my life as well (Ellis & Bochner, 2002).

As my principalship has progressed over these five years, I have come to see my knowledge in terms of a narrative life history, as storied life compositions. These stories, these narratives of experience are both personal and social. The stories are lived out within interwoven and multi-layered scenes and plotlines (Clandinin & Connelly, 1998) and shows how embedded I am in the complexities of life, trying to restore coherence that calls on my own meaning of life and brings my personal values into question (Ellis & Bochner, 2002).

As the story teller, the anxiety in this auto-ethnographic narrative has been great and the temptation to escape the whole research process tempting at times (Delamont, 2009). I dispel any notion of being an independent, objective observer. I am asking readers to partcipate in my life drama by reflexively examining the implications of a worldview that is my own.

## 3.3 RESEARCH APPROACH AND PARADIGM

The key ontological point of departure in this research is that people are active constructors of their own reality in the form of multiple, intangible mental constructions which are socially and experientially based. These constructions are alterable, as are their associated realities (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Guba and Lincoln (1994) explain further that people are constantly in the process of interacting with their environment and other people. As they interact they give meaning and

construct new knowledge. Husserl in (Yilmaz, 2008) confirms this opinion that we can say nothing at all with certainty about life beyond our own thoughts and experiences. Knowledge cannot exist outside our minds, truth is not absolute; and knowledge is not discovered but constructed by individuals based on experiences. The only way therefore to understand human interaction is to understand the meanings they give to their world. This can best be known through a qualitative study where I present a theoretical framework for narrative knowing by plaiting together constructivist, humanist, feminist and hermeneutist theory  (Nieuwenhuis , 2011; Creswell, 2014; Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Yang, 2011) as the rationale for narrative inquiry. Narrative inquiry aims to produce knowledge of human experience. It is viewed as a research method to inquire into 'narrative ways of knowing' (Yang, 2011).

**Constructivist Theory**

Constructivism supports the view that individuals seek understanding of the world in which they live and work. Individuals develop subjective meanings of their experiences which are varied and multiple (Creswell, 2014). "Readers assuming this way of participating in the narrative experience of another must be prepared to see the possible meanings there are in the story and, through this process, come to see possible other ways of telling their own stories" (Clandinin and Connelly, 1989:18).Turning around a dysfunctional school culture meant I had to construct different meanings in different interactions. Auto-ethnography allowed me to intricately deal with my own constructors of reality.

**Humanist Theory**

Humanist learning theorists emphasize that a person's perceptions which are centered on their own experiences affect what they think they are capable of becoming. In the humanist view, knowledge is gained through experience and is relative to the individual (Yang, 2011).

**Feminist Theory**

Connelly and  Clandinin, (1990) align narrative research with feminist studies. Feminist theory can be explained as stories or narratives of emotion, intuition and

relationships which give special voice to the feminine side of the human experience (Yang, 2011). In *Women's Ways of Knowing* , (Belenky, Clinchy, Blythe,Goldberger, Tarule,1997) advocate that the development of a sense of voice, mind, and self are intricately interwoven and are inseparable for women. Narrative research values dialogue as a way to have voices heard (Yang, 2011). As a newly appointed woman principal I spent time developing relationships with staff and pupils. My aim was to create a safe and quieter environment conducive to learning with a focus on building community, improving communicating and developing an ethic of care (Sergiovanni, 1992).

**Hermeneutist Theory**

Life, from a hermeneutic perspective is the human experience in the world. Life has an implicit meaning, which is made explicit in stories. Therefore, life and story are internally related (Yang, 2011). Hermeneutics means the theory of interpretation, in this study the theory of understanding of textual data (Nieuwenhuis, 2011). A characteristic of hermeneutist theory is that the researcher can return to the textual data again and again, gaining an increased understanding and a more complete interpretive account each time (Yang, 2011).

The critical elements of these theories I have plaited together can be summarised as truth, voices, dialogues and interpretations which make up my narrative knowing (Yang, 2011).Combining and utilizing a constructivist, humanist, feminist and hermeneutist worldview enables me to penetrate multiple constructed realities including myself as researcher, those of the participants involved in the study and those of the reader interpreting the study (Creswell, 2014).The ontological foundation for truth in this auto-ethnography is the self, me who was 'there'!

A qualitative approach allowed me to collect data in the natural setting of the school. I examine, critically reflect on my leadership role and document changes in the school's functioning over time. My focus is on understanding the meaning that the participants hold about change and the effects it has had on the school and the school community (Roberts, 2010). As researcher I was interactively linked with the

investigation which means that findings were literally created as the research proceeded (Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

This qualitative research study is largely inductive as I generate meaning from the data collected, shaped by my own experiences and background (Crotty, 1998). Through this approach, I construct a rich, meaningful thick description of my leadership journey towards turning a school from being largely faltering to becoming effective in its educational functioning. By thick description, I mean a detailed description of the school setting, the participants and the themes of the study. A thick description will take readers as much as possible into the school under study and its main characters (Roberts, 2010). Methodological transparency strengthens the understanding of this auto-ethnographic narrative (Ellis & Bochner, 2002).

## 3.4 RESEARCH DESIGN

Since my appointment I have wanted to write about my own learning experiences that could be a contribution to knowledge in helping other principals in a similar situation to the one in which I found myself on becoming principal. The epistemological assumption is that I am both researcher and subject . This qualitative study then is a personal narrative, an auto-ethnography, a vehicle of reflexivity to detail my journey on the processes and approaches I used in turning around a faltering school culture (Walford, 2009). I am writing retrospectively and selectively about my experiences emanating from my appointment as principal of a school with a declining school culture (Creswell, 2014).

I am deliberately seeking to use an emic perspective so that change can be described and analysed from the inside (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). I have captured moments of epiphany and sheer terror in my own leadership by exploring processes and events. An auto-ethnographic stance allows for introspection of my feelings and motives, self-questioning and preparedness to confront contradictions. This auto-ethnographic research makes it possible for me to contemplate my leadership as the major foci of the investigation. As an auto- ethnographer, I can analyse my own actions more thoroughly than any other researcher as I possess the

information and have access to events and situations as they occurred at the school where I am principal. The reflections on my stories are a means to explore, analyse and comprehend the effects of leadership change (Fullan, 2002). Auto-ethnography has finally allowed me to locate and make sense of my experiences these last five years.

I selected those participants who have had an on-going association with the school under the previous and current leadership. Furthermore as I am the main research subject (informant) I chose participants who could best serve the purpose of my study which is to describe my leadership and the processes and dynamics in turning a school from being largely dysfunctional to becoming effective in its educational functioning once again. The greatest risk in auto-ethnographies is researcher bias and so by involving participants I am able to get a 360 degree feedback loop thus creating a more balanced picture (Creswell, 2014).

The criterion for selection included those participants who could accurately recall the period prior to 2013. In collecting the data, I interviewed six different categories of participants: two heads of department, two administrative staff members, two teaching staff Members, four grade seven learners, two chairpersons of the school governing body both past and present as well as three support staff members. Participants were made aware of the time required for the free flowing narrative interviews.

An important criterion for participation in this study is to reach theoretical and data saturation meaning that one stops gathering fresh data when it no longer sparks new insights or reveals new properties (Creswell, 2014). The purpose of data saturation is that it verifies and ensures comprehension and completeness (Morse et al in Bowen, 2008).Theoretical saturation is the point at which no new insights are obtained, no new themes are recognized and no issues arise regarding the category of data. Saturation of all categories signifies the point at which to end the research (Bowen, 2008). While there doesn't appear to be any definite rules for determining saturation, Hyde (in Bowen 2008) suggests that saturation is derived from clear and rigorous procedures of summarizing data and the understanding of all accounts for

all possible explanations of the phenomenon. In conducting this qualitative study, I chose participants who provided the best opportunity to reach data saturation. I believe that the data collected throughout this study provides the necessary theoretical saturation.

## 3.5 DATA GATHERING INSTRUMENTS

Data collection for this study consisted of narratives and records that contributed to the telling of the story, the accounts of my experiences. Data collection was also used for engaging in a process of reflexivity (Hughes, Pennington, & Makris, 2012). Apart from self-reflection, this auto-ethnography presents defensible data sources which also include interviews, documents and audio recordings.

The goal of data collection is to gain enough pertinent information to answer the research questions of this study. My data collection strategies stem from the need to address the research goals as well as the specifics of auto-ethnographic design (Neyman, 2011), examining the processes and approaches in turning around a dysfunctional school to becoming fully functional again.

### 3.5.1 Self reflection

Reflexivity is a process where I comment on my personal beliefs, values and biases that shape this enquiry. I do this using a narrative commentary throughout the discussion of the findings (Creswell & Miller, 2000). I also present negative evidence that runs counter to the themes found in the research (Creswell & Miller, 2000).The search for disconfirming evidence provides further support for the credibility of my writing (Creswell & Miller, 2000).

Reflexivity not only reveals my epistemological, ontological and methodical premises but also my personality (Humphreys, 2005). Reflexivity is a self-conscious introspection guided by the desire to understand myself and others better through the examination of my actions and perceptions in reference to and in dialogue with participants (Anderson, 2006). Self-reflection shows ways in which I change as a result of working within the setting of the school (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011). I

also acknowledge that my own actions and decisions will inevitably impact upon the meaning and context of my experience (Horsburgh, 2003). By reflexivity , I realise that I am an integral part of the study and that neutrality and detachment in relation to data collection, analyis and interpretation is impossible (Horsburgh, 2003).

As the informant providing the information, I reflect on and analyse information. This is an iterative process of self-disclosure meaning that I arrive at a decision by repeating rounds of analysis with the objective of bringing the desired decision closer to discovery with each repetition.

This study is about coming to understand myself and others more deeply (Ellis & Bochner 2000 in Walford 2009: 276). Being personally engaged in narrative stories I try to avoid a confessional tale and attempt a realist tale, documenting and theorizing my leadership and its effect on a culture of change in a school setting (Walford, 2009).

### 3.5.2 Document analysis

I focused on all types of written communication that shed light on my study and on which I could reflect. Written sources included governing body portfolio reports, minutes of staff meetings, letters, school newsletters, circulars, memos and official documents connected to my research. An advantage of document analysis is that documents can be accessed at a time convenient to me and it is an unobtrusive source of information. I was conscious that not all people are equally articulate in their writing of document sources and documents might not be accurate. In the interest of crystallisation, documents serve to corroborate the evidence of the narrative interviews (Creswell, 2014).

### 3.5.3 Narrative interviews

Another data collection tool in narrative inquiry is the unstructured interview. Instead of using structured interviews which mostly fall under the question and answer type where the interviewer sets the agenda (Nieuwenhuis, 2011), I used a narrative approach in which my responsibility was to be a good listener and then a story teller. Narrative form allows for an ongoing attempt to place specific encounters, events

and understandings into a more meaningful context (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Using a narrative approach, the agenda of the free flowing interview was open to change and could develop depending on the participants' experiences and so I collected stories about myself as a leader and changes made in the school.

The limitation of interviews is that not all people are equally articulate especially as I interviewed two support staff whose mother tongue is not English although they both have an understanding of English. The third support staff member who speaks fluent English assisted with the interpretation of interviews as my Zulu is not fluent. I was sensitive to the fact that cultural background plays a significant role in how participants respond to questions (Leedy & Ellis Ormrod, 2014).

The primary disadvantage of using unstructured interviews is that I got different information from different people and was not always able to compare all the responses of the various interviewees (Leedy & Ellis Ormrod, 2014).

After the initial introductory interviews were conducted to familiarize participants with the field of study, a second interview was scheduled where I used using free flowing narrative to gather information. I conducted in-depth free flowing narrative interviews with each of the six categories of participants. The purpose of the free flowing narrative interviews  was to discuss with  the participants perceptions regarding how the school under study, had changed over recent years and the role that certain stakeholders have played in that process. I recorded the interviews using a digital recorder and took handwritten notes during the interviews.

The questions to initiate free flowing narrative for the two heads of department, two administrative staff members, four teaching staff members, two chairpersons of the school governing body both past and present as well as two support staff members were based upon this study's theoretical framework (Figure 2).

### 3.5.4 Auto vignettes as a vehicle of reflective journaling

Key to this case study is reflective journaling. A journal was kept of experiences, beginning with my appointment as principal. As informant providing the information, I reflect on and analyse information. This is an iterative process of self-disclosure meaning that I arrive at a decision by repeating rounds of analysis with the objective of bringing the desired decision closer to discovery with each repetition.

This study is about coming to understand myself and others more deeply (Ellis and Bochner 2000 in Walford, 2009). Van Manen (1977) suggests that when an individual uses critical thinking and self-reflection that that person usually arrives at a new level of comprehension through self-development. Denzin (1997) posits that auto-ethnographic vignettes enhance reflexivity in qualitative research and helps readers relive experiences through the writer's eyes. Formal observation of school leadership and cultural change may not give a clear picture of the actual process of leadership and change. Observation can be patchy and thus may not reveal what actually goes on behind closed doors of the school. However using auto-ethnographic vignettes in this case study might be a response to the need to understand the effects of moral leadership and the culture of change that would otherwise be hidden from the public eye (Denzin, 1997).

### 3.6. DATA ANALYSIS

The purpose of data analysis is to make sense of the accumulated data. The purpose of this research project was to collect and analyse stories of participants to support my narrative. In order to analyse the data, all narrative interviews were transcribed. I then applied a narrative analysis to the data collected through interviews and documentation (Nieuwenhuis, 2011). The methodology of narrative analysis is to search for commonalities running across texts as well as major emerging themes (Nieuwenhuis, 2011).

The qualitative data gathered from interviews was analyzed using Creswell's ( 2014) seven step systematic data analysis approach. Raw data was collected and transcribed and narrative interviews were prepared for analysis. I read through the

data several times to become familiar with it all. After this review process I coded the data using descriptive wording. I then worked through the identified codes and grouped the data according to categories. The categories were not set in advance to ensure that my experiences determined the results and that I did not have an expectation of results. Qualitative researchers use inductive analysis by examining data directly and allowing codes to emerge from the data (Nieuwenhuis, 2011). Once separated and categorized, the data was used to provide details, events, thoughts and descriptions to help in my emotional recall process.  As researcher this recall process was an intensive reflection of a specific memory, necessary for the selection of events chosen to be retold in a narrative (Ellis & Bochner, 2002). The rigour in analysing data involves moving back and forth with the data, being personally entrenched and then moving back with a subjective and an objective view of the themes developing in layers (Tenni, Smyth, & Boucher, 2003).The final step in the data analysis is to record  lessons learned (Creswell, 2014).

Given my involvement in the research, the question is not whether the research is biased but rather the question considers the transparency of the data collection, data analysis and presented data (Horsburgh, 2003). It is important that I acknowledge my responsibility for editing and the selection of material. Omissions may be of equal or greater significance but are unlikely to be identifiable in the research paper (Horsburgh, 2003).


## 3.7 APPARENCY, TRANSFERABILITY AND VERISIMILITUDE

Connelly and Clandinin (1990) caution squeezing the language of narrative criteria into a language created for other forms of research. Narratives rely on criteria other than validity, reliability and generalizability. Rather, the more serious issues of apparency, transferability and verisimilitude guide the narrative writer. As a narrative writer I move backwards and forwards several times as various threads are narrated and thus have to make use of temporal defeasibility, a distinction between storied time and discourse time. In other words a distinction between events as lived and events as told, central to a good narrative and for avoiding the illusion of causality (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). The auto-ethnographic process of data collection

involved in my narrative account serves to illustrate my experiences through my detailed narrations of specific events. In an attempt to achieve apparency, transferability and verisimilitude I endeavour to name my subjectivity and am explicit about my research design, data and intentions (Hughes, et al., 2012).

### 3.7.1 Apparency

Apparency refers to a plausible account that rings true (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990) , a narrative truth with an emphasis on a life-like, intelligible and plausible story which makes sense (Sandelowski, 1991). Apparency can be considered in terms of how the reader makes sense of the details and the degree of recognition of someone's life (Clandinin & Connelly, 1998). In presenting these narrative stories I concur with Clandinin and Connelly (1998) that they do not reduce the reader's trust, but rather enhance it. The narrative stories do not distort the responsibility of the reader and the authenticity of the work, but give clarity (Humphreys, 2005). This auto-ethnographic narrative provides details of the everyday situations faced by a principal in turning around a dysfunctional school culture. There is emotion here, feelings of failure and success which the reader can share (Humphreys, 2005). I remove my mask to expose doubt of my ability as a principal and unsureness of myself in making a difference.

Although narrative and life go together, the attraction of a narrative method is its capacity to render life experiences in relevant and meaningful ways. However this same method is a two-edged inquiry sword (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). One could tell a deception easily as a truth. As narrative inquirer I must listen closely to critics as every criticism is valid to some degree and contains an important point (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). Story writing and critical analysis are separate fields and as narrative writer I need to be proficient in both and find ways of becoming 'I, the critic' (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). Another danger of narrative is what Connelly and Clandinin (1990) refer to as the 'Hollywood plot' where everything works out well in the end. Spence (1986) in (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990) calls this process 'narrative smoothing'. To acknowledge narrative smoothing one must be as alert to stories not told as to those that are (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990).

Another apparency check is spending a prolonged time in the field which solidifies evidence because I am able to double check data and any hunches I might have. I am in a position of having experience with participants in the school setting, thus findings can be more realistic and more valid (Creswell, 2014).

To ensure apparency, I use member checking which consists of taking the data and interpretations back to the participants in this study so that they can confirm the credibility of the narrative account. Throughout this process I continually ask participants if the themes make sense, whether they have been developed with sufficient evidence and whether the overall account is realistic and accurate. In this way the participants add apparency to the study.. I conduct a follow up interview with participants and in so doing provide them with an opportunity to comment on the findings (Creswell, 2014).

To establish further apparency, I use someone external to the study, my supervisor, whose goal it is to examine the processes and procedures of the inquiry and to determine the plausibility of the findings (Creswell, 2014).

### 3.7.2 Transferability

Unlike generalizability which is applied by researchers to research findings, transferability is a process performed by readers of research. Readers note the particulars of the research situation and compare them to the particulars of the environment with which they are familiar. If there are enough similarities, then the reader may be able to transfer the results of a study to another context (Colorado State, 1996; Ellis & Bochner, 2002). Simply put, transferability describes the process of applying the results of research in one situation to other similar situations (Colorado State, 1996). Connelly and Clandinin (1990) caution narrative story tellers about what they term 'broadening', not making generalizations but rather concentrating on the event (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). I would therefore need to describe phenomena in sufficient detail to avoid 'broadening' (Hughes, Pennington, & Makris, 2012; Connelly & Clandinin, 1990).

In order to achieve transferability in this study, I provide a thick description of the school environment, research methods and my findings. The importance of this is to allow readers to make an informed judgement about whether they can transfer the findings to their own situation (Colorado State, 1996). Because I am conducting a study on myself, I cannot generalize the results to other populations. However, the detailed results make this auto-ethnography narrative conducive to transferability (Colorado State, 1996). Transferability takes into account that there are no absolute answers to a given situation but rather that individuals determine their own best practice. Readers of research need to be aware that results cannot always be transferred, a result that occurs in one situation will not necessarily occur in a similar situation (Colorado State, 1996).

### 3.7.3 Verisimilitude

For auto-ethnographers, validity means that a work strives for verisimilitude; meaning it conjures up in the reader a feeling that the experience described is lifelike, believable and possible; a feeling that what has been represented could be true. The story is coherent. It connects the reader to the writer and provides continuity in their lives (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011). An auto-ethnographic narrative achieves verisimilitude if it helps readers communicate with others different from themselves or offers a way to improve the lives of participants and readers or even the author's own life (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011). This auto-ethnographic narrative is a rich, full account that includes self-doubt, mistakes, embarrassments and inconsistencies (Ellis & Bochner, 2002).

### 3.8 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Ethical considerations are problematic in a narrative auto-ethnography. It is almost impossible to write and publish ethically. It is also nearly impossible for partcipants to be disguised or protected because as a researcher I do not live in isolation but am connected to colleagues and pupils (Delamont, 2009; Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011). Readers wish to read auto-ethnography as an authentic and true account and so I will have to protect the privacy and safety of participants by

altering identifying characteristics such as, gender, name, place and appearance (Ellis, Adams & Bochner, 2011).

Relational ethics are heightened because as a narrator I am using personal experience and am not only implicating myself in my work but also staff members with whom I value close interpersonal relationships (Ellis, Adams & Bochner, 2011). I consider relational concerns as a crucial dimension of this research inquiry. It has been uppermost in my mind throughout the research and writing process. My obligation then has been to show my narratives to participants implicated in or by my texts, allowing them to respond, and/or acknowledge how they feel about what is being written about them and allowing them to give feedback on how they have been represented in the narrative (Ellis, Adams & Bochner, 2011). After all, I have to be able to continue to live in the world of relationships in which my research is embedded after the research is completed (Ellis, Adams & Bochner, 2011). I requested permission to conduct research from the HOD of Provincial Education through e-mail correspondence. Permission was granted and I began collecting data in November 2016 and completed my collection by the end of February 2017.

Prior to the free flowing narrative interviews, all six categories of participants were contacted via email correspondence and where email correspondence was not available; face to face conversations were set up as an initial introductory interview. The sole purpose of these interviews was to familiarize the participants with the background of the study and to explain the research process. The five learners each received an additional letter explaining the concept of research and outlining important information they should know (Annexure 4). Accompanying the letter, each participant received a copy of the Research Participant Informed Consent Form (Annexure 3) and a copy of the University of Pretoria's ethics Committee approval letter. Some of the participants requested a copy of the interview schedule, prior to signing the informed consent, which was then provided to them (Annexures 1 and 2). All participants had access to my contact details and those of my supervisor. To avoid audience captivity, participants had the opportunity to withdraw from interviews at any stage. The initial informal introductory interviews were reassuring conversations to establish trust and respect with the participants so that I could

detect any potential marginalisation of participants before the study began (Creswell,2014).

The Research Participant Informed Consent Form assured participants of the confidentiality of the information shared with me. All of the participants agreed to participate in the study. Interviews, except those of the learners and support staff, were scheduled through a shared Google Calendar. The leaners' interviews were arranged with each class teacher after writing their end of year exams.

## 3.9 DELIMITATIONS

The purpose of the study is to explore and describe the processes and dynamics of turning a largely dysfunctional school into becoming functional again. I limited the study to those participants who could accurately recall the period prior to 2013. In collecting the data, I interviewed six different categories of participants: two heads of department, two administrative staff members, two teaching staff members, four grade seven learners, two chairpersons of the school governing body both past and present as well as three support staff members. I used free flowing unstructured interviews where each of the participants was recorded. In order to assure manageability of the collected data, all interviews were transcribed.

## 3.10. SUMMARY

This was a qualitative study utilizing auto-ethnography narrative as a means of enquiry, weaving together a worldview using constructivist, humanist, feminist and hermeneutist theories as a means of achieving a narrative knowing worldview that enabled me to penetrate a multiple of constructed realities. Through interviewing six different categories of participants and using interview protocols aligned with this study's theoretical model (Figure I), I gathered data on the processes and approaches in turning around a dysfunctional school to become fully functional again. The digitally recorded interviews were transcribed by a transcriptionist, reviewed for accuracy by myself and participants. The transcripts were manually coded using Creswell's (2014) seven step systematic data analysis approach

(Creswell ,2014). Chapter 4 is a shared account of auto-ethnographic narratives and their reflections supported by findings.

# CHAPTER FOUR
# VIGNETTES

## 4.1 INTRODUCTION

At last I open my laptop and begin to write. I find the struggle is lessened as I ease into the role of auto-ethnographer (Tenni, Smyth, & Boucher, 2003). Events at the school have no made me feel confident. There are real issues of leadership and I am constantly being put to the test. It is exhausting. The school feels wobbly and the ability to make sustainable change appears out of reach and at the same time I want to complete my master's degree for personal development purposes but I also want to do it authentically. I want to learn not just about the research process but about myself and what I am capable of. I am not sure that I am capable of much at this stage. Somehow the act of writing down my thoughts, in all its messiness, helps me explore the confusion I am feeling (Tenni, Smyth, & Boucher, 2003).

The foregoing narratives, chapters one to three, then are my attempt to conceptualize my journey as a newly appointed principal in turning around a dysfunctional school culture. Through this narrative, I draw on experiences that have transformed my way of thinking and have influenced me as a principal through a process of remembering, reflexivity, reflecting, learning, changing, being and becoming!

## 4.2 VIGNETTE ONE – SETTING THE STAGE

*As a little girl, my dream was to be a teacher. Over the years, I changed my mind a few times, but I always came back to teaching. On arrival at my first post as a novice teacher, I met the principal, a giant of a man both in stature and moral character (I was to later learn, a man with the gentlest heart). He took me under his wing, probably sensing my terror and I was given the directive to pick up the reigns in standard five'd' as the teacher had suffered a nervous breakdown and resigned from the profession. The children were, well quite disorderly and to date no one had been able to control them.*

*I vividly recall the first day I walked into that notorious standard 5 class. Children were out of their seats and a great deal of noise abounded. A short little girl walked up to me and said "We do not like you and we don't want you here!" My reply, "I don't think I like you either but there is not much we can do about that now is there? Get back to your seat, we have work to do!" I shudder as I think back on my immaturity and apologise profusely to those learners who lived through that experience. Ironically I often see Ruth, now a grown woman in the local shopping mall and I am so tempted to walk up to her and recall the conversation we had all those years ago.*

*As a first year teacher and the newest recruit on the staff, the principal paced the corridor outside the standard 5 class a great deal that first term, keeping a watchful eye over me. At the end of the term he very proudly announced that he had not received one complaint. I remember feeling quite affronted that he should think there would be complaints. Young and inexperienced, I did not realise that this principal was a shining example of a moral leader. He experienced, displayed, modelled and celebrated what he hoped and expected the teachers and the children would do. He built a school around values (Sergiovanni, 1992). And so began my career, I knew I wanted to become a principal one day. I kept in touch with the principal, until his death two years ago. On realising how ill he was, I felt the need to thank and remind him what he had taught me as a young inexperienced teacher. Silent tears flowed down his cheeks as he sat in his wheelchair, holding my hand and listening. He had no idea of the impact or influence his leadership had had on me, inspiring me to become a principal.*

*Over time I became a head of department then deputy principal at the same school, a position I held for close on nine years but I wanted more and so I applied for a principalship position. I vividly recall ironically a dark cloudy morning, being told that my application for promotion had been successful and I was to take up my first post the following day. It was an emotional moment. The words of the principal will forever remain etched in my memory: "Do you really know what you are doing?" I didn't of course and had no idea what a formidable task lay ahead of me. I was appointed to a school that hadn't had a principal at its helm for close to two years*

*and was plagued with problems, deep seated problems of which I was initially unaware.*

*I left the confines of a comfortable environment I knew so well and where I had learnt a great deal from the second principal, a visionary leader who also took a keen interest in my career. He was supportive of my personal and professional growth. His passion and energy were contagious and my nine years as deputy principal were spent being mentored in all aspects of running a school. Without the inspiring example and mentorship of both of these principals my career would undoubtedly have turned out differently. I knew in my heart that I really wanted the promotion, aware that I needed to leave the comfort of my current position if I was to continue to grow.  I saw my move in the same community as one where I could still feel at home but simultaneously challenged, stimulated and excited.*

*I felt like Alice in Wonderland  walking into the new school, it was surreal, stepping back in time into a twilight zone, into a strange parallel world of school that I paradoxically, knew well but didn't at that moment. I arrived at the school with mixed feelings of excitement and anticipation. The welcome was fraught with anxiety as the head of department who had acted as principal for close on two  years had learnt that morning of my arrival that she had not got the post that she had eagerly anticipated.  The departmental official along with the chairman of the governing body shook my hand heartily and welcomed me.  The departmental official then arranged for me to meet the staff. As we made that walk along the corridor to the staffroom, a converted classroom, he explained that the school was being considered by educational authorities as non-viable because the enrolment had dropped sharply. I knew this; it was an open secret in our area that the school was struggling.*

*My first impression of the principal's office was how cluttered it was.  Heavy curtains and valances adorned the windows, blocking out a magnificent view of the sea, papers and official documents were piled high around the walls. One always has to see the funny side of a serious and tense situation. The bursar, wanting to ensure I settled in, warned me not to lean too hard on the right hand side of the desk as it*

*was broken. Sure enough, by the end of the day the desk was leaning heavily to the right at an awful angle and the computer was in danger of sliding right off the desk.*

*That first day was numbing. I sat alone in the office with my thoughts as I surveyed my surroundings, taking in the huge task of clearing out the office before I could get to work. I felt extremely vulnerable and alone, frightened of the unfamiliar. The principal of my previous school popped in to visit and if I could have at that moment, I would gone back to my old position. He walked into my new office, looked at me and said, "You can do this, you are ready for this". I needed to hear these words of encouragement at this vulnerable time. In my heart I did not believe I had the capacity to lead the school. Like Alice, I felt that I had a limited perspective of the world around me.  I had limited power to influence as principal at this stage and so began a transformative journey. The next five years passed so quickly and would see me on an intense learning path gaining valuable experience about myself as a leader and managing the change process.*

### 4.2.1. Reflection on Vignette One

I was aware of the initial challenges in my new leadership position and did not feel that my appointment was of any significance. I was so caught up in my own turmoil of trying to build my own credibility as a leader. To support my thoughts and feelings in vignette one, participants empathised on how hostile it must have been walking into the school on that first day. However, participants recall my arrival at the school as having a positive impact, citing that during the first year of my appointment staff 'woke up' and realised that change was necessary. Shan voiced concern that the appointment had taken close on two years and during this time, the school had lost community support.

 A common theme across all interviews was the positive impact of the change in leadership and management routines. Participants felt that great strides have been made because of the appointment of the right type of leadership which brought in fresh ideas and a new perspective. Roanne felt the staff are more respectful of the management team now than before and planning, policies and guidance have been introduced.  Jason echoed these sentiments, stating "…we know where we stand

and know exactly what is required. There is reflection on policy, teaching and events in order to adapt and improve". Jason elaborated by contending that, reflexivity is part of school routine. Further management changes as a result of my appointment were echoed by support staff who feel that they are treated better, echoed in these words by Dennis, "We having coffee and tea, before we weren't getting that". This sentiment was corroborated by Jason who appreciates being spoken to in private when something goes wrong. Most participants spoke of their appreciation of better communication. Shan shared that before my appointment as principal, " I think we've reached our bottom and I think we are on our way up now."

Participants in this study believed that the resultant change in staff due to my appointment was good. Sentiments expressed were that some staff had become complacent and did not like the order and structure that was implemented. At first I felt guilty and responsible for their resignation. On reflection, I now realise attrition is normal when there is a change in leadership. Staff that were left, according to Kath, were ready to work with the new changes. To support my claim Shan shared the following sentiment: "Whenever you have a change of head or leadership I should say, you are going to get a change of staff but I think the school needed that. I think some of those people were just cruising and then when order and structure came they didn't like it so they moved on".

The school under study had weak leadership and management structures, there was organisational breakdown. Information was poorly communicated, and general administration was poor (Christie, 1998). Based on the discussion in chapter two and the data collected, it can be assumed that for a culture of teaching and learning to operate, it is necessary to establish proper and effective leadership and management systems and structures with clear procedures and clear lines of authority, powers, responsibility and accountability (Christie, 1998). The principal of an effective school then is seen as the organisational architect, initiating and orchestrating change (van Deventer & Kruger, 2011).

I faced many hurdles during that first year which taught me that it is not challenges that define you but how you respond to them. Every decision I made was compared to how the last principal ran things, my gut reaction at first was to react defensively. However, I soon reasoned that comparing previous ways with new is nt a bad thing

as engaging in discussions with staff provided clarity of my expectations, vision and my leadership style. Positive direction can emerge from conversations about differences between the new and the old way of doing things. I also relied heavily on the support of my more experienced peers.  I did not see this collaboration as a sign of weakness but rather one of support from colleagues who had once been in my shoes.  I recall a time when I needed another perspective on a situation in which a staff member asked for special leave to enjoy a holiday during term time, a viewpoint which conflicted with my understanding of the leave policy. Talking through it with another principal who was a neutral party and who understood both viewpoints, gave me the confidence to explain to the staff member the difficulty in allowing such leave.

I also learnt in that first year that it is important to reflect and process information before speaking to staff. With the endless flow of information, I felt overwhelmed and became obsessed with the need to be seen as efficient and overlooked being thoughtful in those early heady days. I identify with Parkay, Currie and  Rhodes, (1992) who recognise different stages of professional socialisation for newly appointed principals. The first stage I found myself in was that of survival. I experienced initial shock, I felt professionally inadequate and frustrated while my professional insecurity and personal concerns were high. The second stage is control. My primary concern during this stage was to set priorities and to get to the position of being in control of the "overwhelming flow of new demands" (Parkay et al., 1992:57).

I reflect on this vignette as it was a defining moment realising that I was  the principal of my very own school and that staff members were looking to me for leadership and guidance, yet I sat in that awful office, frozen and really not quite knowing where to start.  I felt both alone and lonely. However, the teaching, support and administrative staff, cautious at first, started pouring through my office door with complaints, advice and suggestions. The problems seemed enormous and endless. One of the major themes that came through in collecting data from participants was that leadership change was long overdue and that the biggest impact on the school has been the change of principal. This gives me reassurance now, however at the time, it was certainly what I needed and would like to have heard. To support my claims, responses from pupil participants describe me as diligent, smart and extra ordinary,

kind and very, very generous. Weston, a grade 7 learner, shared , " You're a very inspiring person, and I think I might want to be like you one day.  You inspire me a lot".  Meg, also in Grade 7 shared, "You give, you are always trying to improve our school and make everyone have the best day at school ever".


## 4.3 VIGNETTE TWO – ENVISION

*Whatever lens I used to view the school, one thought remained constant in my mind - chaos. I was challenged by my experiences and I began to question myself, my values and who I am (Carroll, 1869). I felt uncertainty in this new school environment. I clung to an in-built sense of order. This sense of order was soon put to the test by the chaotic setting of the school (Carroll, 1869).  Rationally, I realize this is my state of mind, an exaggerated example of a perpetually chaotic environment which I found myself sinking into, which only served to confirm the need for a vision as the school had lost its sense of direction (Carroll, 1869).*

*By its very nature, chaos is impossible to control completely, and so I entered into my own chaotic world which presented with difficulties immediately. During my adventures, the chaos slowly revealed a complete absence of structure, a lack of clear information, and a cast of frantic characters - the staff (Carroll, 1869). As principal I must strive to find order in the chaos. I was faced with riddles, information that was either unclear or unavailable.  I had to solve the riddles and establish structure, all while appeasing the staff (Carroll, 1869).*

*As the facilitator of change, I had to strive to find order in the chaos. Like a detective, I had to elicit the information necessary to discover problems, establish their root causes, and push toward a valid solution. This course of action was hindered by muddled information, a lack of direction, and the absence of regulated procedures for dealing with problems. I had to practice critical thought, even in the face of chaos and denial.*

*I was confronted with uncertainty and disorder. The directionless characters, lack of clarity, and the unstructured world created by Lewis Carroll's Alice in Wonderland (Carroll, 1869) acted as something of a miniature model of the chaos of my school world. Just as Alice strives to create order from disorder, I had to transform unknown things into known things in order to complete the task as a facilitator of change and locate strategies that would enable me to not only survive but propel me to stay motivated (Carroll, 1869).*

*During the deeply stressful first few weeks as I sat at the principal's broken desk on a filthy chair, I recall staff slowly making their way through my office door and talking about the problems that needed to be addressed. The full extent of the poor state of the school unfolded day by day. I listened. I listened to staff who popped into my office to chat, I listened on the corridors, I listened on the side of the sports field, I listened during break time, I listened in staff meetings, I listened on the playground, I listened in the car park. I engaged with as many people as I could to get a clearer picture of the chaos that was school.*

*The school was indeed ineffective in so many areas. Enrolment had dropped; morale was at an all-time low and parent support, hardly existent. Key staff had left in desperation and the building was in a state of extreme disrepair. Bullying and behavioural problems were rife and the school's reputation in tatters. Although a quintile five school in a good neighbourhood, we were not attracting children in our geographical area, numbers had dropped markedly, fee payment was poor and bad debt excessively high in relation to budget provision. We were no longer competitive on the sports field in most sporting codes. On reflection, the only way I can describe the staff is to say that they had been emotionally neglected. Despite this, I was struck by their deep passion for the school and the children in their care; they just didn't know what to do to put it right.*

*We had to adopt a vision that was the starting point. Discussions with the staff revealed that the school had once held dear the value of care and that of being a family school and so began relationship building. I set up a strategic meeting with all*

*the staff and members of the governing body where we redefined our vision, mission and values. It was a collaborative activity after which the staff involved the pupils identifying values that make our school the special place it is and as so we reached a consensus; I MARCH. This acronym stands for manners, accountability, respect, commitment and honesty. In order for the school community to live the values, the agreed values had to be visible to the school community and so I had them displayed on a feature wall for all to see. The values started to permeate our school culture.*

**Figure 3 Values wall**

*What happened next made me believe I was doing something right!
Two little boys knocked on my office door one morning and asked if they could
please chat with me. "Of course," came the reply. Instead of sitting down they walked
around to my side of the desk and tied a bracelet made of string made up of four little
blue plastic dolphins onto my wrist. Taken aback I thanked them for the gift
especially as it had been so thoughtfully made. I was then asked if I knew what
dolphins did in the sea. Before I could respond I was offered this explanation: "Well
dolphins are known to rescue people who are in trouble." "Yes," I said. "And you
have rescued us." It was a moment that will stay with me forever. While I thanked the
little chaps for their very kind words, I explained that in fact I had not rescued them
at all, our values that we had started to live each day had done that. (I still have the
dolphin bracelet tucked away in my office drawer as a reminder of the journey in
turning the school into a value laden, learning one).*



**Figure 4  Dolphin bracelet**

### 4.3.1 Reflection on vignette two

The overwhelming feeling I recall was that I needed to start the turnaround process with the buy-in of the most precious resource in the school, the people. A strategic planning session ensued, administrative, teaching and support were included and a swot analysis undertaken in specific areas namely: extra-curricular affairs, staff affairs, school community relations, physical facilities, financial affairs and administrative affairs. The staff members were nervous, cautious at first and inhibited to voice their opinions but as the day unfolded I was deeply touched by the passionate contribution of those who felt for the first time that their voices were being heard. There was a lot of emotion, hurt, anger and frustration and negativity expressed. The support staff were especially quiet but slowly warmed to the idea that they too had a valuable contribution to make.

The outcome of this strategic planning session was clear. Whilst small noticeable physical changes took place on a lean budget, the biggest challenge I faced was how to lead the school through a culture of effective and sustainable change. The starting point: our school motto ironically, 'together we progress'. The shared values emanating from the strategic planning session of manners, accountability, respect, commitment and honesty, for which the school was once known, were the start of my formidable journey towards turning around an ineffective school culture.I rolled up my sleeves and put energy into connecting with staff, from working alongside the gardener planting new flowerbeds to walking the corridors and popping into classrooms. I concur with Fullan (2001) that effective leaders must have and continually work on their moral purpose. In the case of the school, moral purpose is making a difference in the lives of the children in our care (Fullan, 2001). Fullan goes on to describe the means of achieving moral purpose is to treat staff well and fairly by building relationships at all levels in the school.

Having the vision to know what to do and the faith that it is the right thing to do is one thing but without the courage to enlist staff in the pursuit of one's vision is hopeless for any changes to be effected (Nieuwenhuis, 2008). I could only achieve the vision through the commitment and effort of the staff. Vision allowed staff to connect with each other and a future they wanted to see. I learnt that first year that my own

internalised personal value system directed my behaviour and was subconsciously at work .Leadership is after all a moral act based on values (Nieuwenhuis , 2008).

To support my writing, responses from participants confirm that the introduction of the values programme meant that the school community started to live the motto of 'together we prosper'. Living shared values has resulted in fewer discipline problems according to one participant and confirmed by Laura (Grade 7) when asked what has changed in recent years, the response was ,"the children's behaviour". Meg (Grade 7) also  commented on how behaviour has improved on the playground  because ball games are rotated allowing all grades a chance to play, so no one grade dominates the space,  " We are given a chance to play ball games at break  now" before ball games were banned.

There is now a supportive recognition system in place to acknowledge good deeds and behaviour. Susan commented that there is more sensitivity towards cultural diversity and exams are no longer written on celebratory days. Data collected from several participants emphasised that the values introduced support a caring, family ethos which the school was once known for and that we are building on this once more. Roanne, cautioned against becoming too big and losing this caring ethos. Pupil participants used the words respect, kindness and caring to describe the school, citing that the values programme has resulted in pupils showing more kindness and respect amongst each other. Laura (grade 7) qualified this sentiment by saying care and kindness had improved.  An event that comes to mind for Weston (Grade 7) is the ten thousand words of kindness barometer run over one term where kind deeds were recorded daily until the target was reached.

The values programme according to another participant is having a positive impact. She feels that the system of selecting values ambassadors gives the pupils a sense of responsibility of not only living the values but influencing their peers too. Other participants tell of the feeling of care tangible in the building, citing the values wall as having made a difference. According to a further participant, the school's vison is being achieved, and the changes and improvement are proof of the vision being put into practice. Jasmin is of the view that the school has turned around in five years

"because of our vison we know where we are going".  A further sentiment shared by Shan is the school "just grows in every direction - from the sport to the academics to the building to the people.  It's just all blossomed.  It's just positive all the way".

Data collected from pupil participants supports my writing that the values programme has resulted in a feeling of more love, respect and kindness. Pupils greet visitors and grade seven mentors sit with those pupils who find themselves alone on the playground.   Further responses include pupil participants' feeling that there is more respect in the school. This was qualified by explaining that the respect shown is indicative of just how much teachers and pupils care for one another. Participants when asked to describe the school in one word responded saying "family".

Participants spoke of the poor reputation of the school prior to re-visioning. Responses from participants support my writing that the new vision is having an effect on the community who want to be associated with the school again. Greg confirmed this opinion, citing members of his church group talking of the change in reputation of the school attracting more children than previously. Leading in these early days was not easy; my path was littered with landmines. I stepped on a few and got quite hurt but as my mother taught me, "pick yourself up and persevere". In many ways my own tension blocked rational thought. I learnt though that I could not lead by emulating what had worked at my previous school. I had to lead consciously and with conviction which I did not always feel. As the months passed by, my confidence grew. I am still in the process of amending and adjusting my leadership based on my learning experiences but remain true to my philosophy, that of being my authentic self - acting with moral purpose and enabling success. In spite of changes, as principal and coming from a moral leadership perspective, I had to keep the big picture in mind while relying on my values and ethics to adjust decisions to do what is in the best interests of the pupils and the school.

## 4.4 VIGNETTE THREE – ENABLE

*Getting a clear understanding of the financial position of the school was imperative. The finance department had for many years operated alone, making the best decisions in the interests of the school. Office staff morale was low, compounded by frequent absenteeism. They did not feel empowered to contribute, their opinions were never sought and they did not feel any support from the principal. As a result, intellectual capacity was wasted and communication and motivation was low.*

*I needed a clear picture of exactly where the school was in terms of its finances. Personnel found my questioning difficult at first. They battled to let go and give me the information I needed. I well remember taking an entire weekend looking at income and expenditure, making lists of questions that needed answering about suppliers and services offered to the school. The governing body paid teachers' salary bill also came under my scrutiny. Based on anticipated income, I estimated we were half a million rand short to meet our expenses that first year. The school fee collection rate was poor and many parents had lapsed even paying their fees despite being a section 21 quintile five school where parents voted to pay compulsory school fees.*

*In those early days, one problem after another hit me and I kept rolling with the punches. Administrative personnel and I spent many hours working together to turn the situation around and we celebrated small victories. I closed down all spending and took the bold step of visiting parents to collect outstanding fees. I visited people in their homes and at their work place. I invited parents to discuss a way forward and spent many hours on the phone following up on school fee payment. Looking back now I don't know where I found the courage. Slowly the coin flipped. It took nine months and at the end of that first year we showed a positive bank balance .There were emotional scenes in the offices where it was explained to me that the school had not ended with a credit balance in a while. Instead parents were asked to pay the following year's fees in advance the year before in order to supplement cash flow over November and December. We slowly notched up a few successes and more importantly the office personnel felt part of the success. Collaboration and encouragement helped personnel develop their confidence and once more feel that the contribution they made to the school was of value, slowly recreating a school*

*culture that respects and empowers. Just like Alice there have been many impassable but not impossible moments when we simply had to find an alternative solution* (Carroll, 1869)*.*


### 4.4.1 Reflection of vignette three

Vignette three is important as it illustrates an example of enabling school improvement. School improvement is the reinvention of what it means to live, learn, teach and lead a school (Beatty, 2007) and once our shared values were determined, it was time to live and practice them so that they become ingrained in our school culture and helped the staff to re-culture our school To enable change and help staff to succeed though, I had to first delve into my own world, the foundation of my reality and recognise that my values, morals and attitude would affect any decision I made (Nieuwenhuis , 2007). Sergiovanni (1992) calls this the heart of leadership. The head of leadership refers to my experience developed over time and the ability to reflect on situations I faced. The head of leadership is shaped by the heart and drives the hand.

I concur with Fullan (2001) that moral purpose, relationships and organizational success are inextricably linked. Through empathy, caring, respect and working together, office personnel and I combined our knowledge and our shared expertise. The beginning of our relationship was wrought with anxiety, stress and break through moments of exhilaration and progress (Fullan, 2001). I attempted to bring the staff together and develop a shared purpose. It was up to me to lead the staff towards solutions to some of the problems we faced and so, together a new school begins to be constructed (Clandinin & Connelly, 1998).

While staff understood that change was necessary, actually dealing with change is another matter. Many compared the change to the old ways of doing things and the struggle to get used to the changes. Others commented on ideas and new ways of doing things as refreshing. Changing attitudes was the biggest hurdle. To support my writing, responses from participants confirm that some staff members were not ready for change and had not thought through the changes that took place. Sentiments were that people do not like change and that staff were in a comfort zone. They

needed to get out of old ways of doing things. Another participant concurred saying that the world is ever changing and as a school we have to keep up with relevant changes. Jasmin noted that weekly administrative and management meetings assisted in better communication throughout the school. Previously admin personnel felt out of the loop. Jason commented that organisational change, new policies and procedures have resulted in the school running more efficiently and had enhanced progress. An example shared is the redefining of job descriptions in the administrative offices which according to Susan has made a remarkable difference. Jasmin commented on the clearing and tidying up process that took place on my arrival in the administrative block with the introduction of a better storage of data. Data collected emphasised an improved financial position of the school after reviewing financial procedures.

Enabling meant putting more structures and systems in place which participants saw as positive. Enabling change according to Neville meant that the school has more structure and key staff have been employed citing the dynamic head of sport's appointment as an example. Data collected indicates that the renovations of the school building were significant and resulted in an increase in enrolment. Enabling change has also resulted in a better vibe on the staff according to Jason while a second participant enjoys working in an enabling environment where I ( the principal) openly shares that she might not have all the answers/solutions to every question but she will find out!

Enabling change meant much to participants who commented on a range of improvements from repairing air conditioners and installing new ones to bringing in a new third phase of electricity, to fixing windows. Better furniture has slowly been purchased and outdated equipment replaced. The gardens have also undergone a transformation. Enabling change has been supported through issuing staff with a manual and policy documents at the beginning of each year. Tammy and Laura (grade 7) commented on the privilege of attending the school and enjoying the new facilities including a new music and computer room with updated technology which has added value to their school experience. A further pupil, Meg (grade 7) commented that while there "has been a lot of change in the buildings, staff changes,

IT changes, it's amazing to see that new pupils really want to be in the school and be a part of our family". Meg (grade 7) qualifies her statement saying, "I think that when the school changed, that more people wanted to come to our school because it was improving and is becoming a better school".

In hindsight, the changes I made were without regard to ongoing stories.  The changes rippled through the school and influenced a whole network of stories and rumours (Clandinin & Connelly, 1998). I have come to realize that parents influence and are influenced by the shifting story of the school web (Clandinin & Connelly, 1998).

## 4.5 VIGNETTE FOUR – ENERGISE

*Re-energising staff and motivating them to look at our school through a more positive lens took time. My understanding of motivation is galvanizing people into action and getting the very best from everyone on the staff. The way to do this is through servant-leadership, modelling the behaviour you wish to see. I think staff in those early days doubted my determination. I often heard, "But it won't work or we can't do it that way…."  Being a principal is a form of stewardship (Sergiovanni, 1992) and stewardship means I do everything in my power to ensure that the school runs effectively and I will not take no for an answer. I believe I practice my leadership by demonstrating how I want the floors polished in the classrooms, by gardening and covering staff's lessons if they are off sick, putting my hand up to do playground duty when short staffed. I am in and out of classrooms twice a week even taking over teaching to allow a staff member extra free time and I do this all cheerfully. I believe through my practice of servant-leadership along with a deep commitment to shared values,   the school community was influenced to contribute their creativity, hearts and minds and that every member on the staff was responsible for the success of the school.*

*The shock and disbelief of the support staff when I arrived at school in gardening clothes to get stuck into cutting back years of neglected and overgrown gardens is perhaps a good example of galvanising staff into action. I rolled up my sleeves and we worked together to redesign a garden near the entrance of the school. The*

*support staff initially were resistant to assisting me as they had been largely left to their own devices.*

*To understand their needs better I initiated weekly grounds and maintenance meetings where the work ahead is planned and assigned to support staff members. Wary at first of being called into my office, they slowly warmed to the idea and now eagerly await our time together contributing positively each Monday morning. Apart from a language barrier, although I do speak a bit of Zulu, the support team came to realise that they finally had a voice and that their opinion and contribution to the running of the school is just as important as the teaching and administrative staff, especially when it came to maintenance issues. They have the skill and experience to advise me of solutions. Their opinion had not been sought before.*

*It took a few months for them to believe in me and understand that their input was just as important as the teaching and administration staff. This meant a great deal, they felt more supported and their own enthusiasm shone through and thus they were motivated to work harder. Another turning point was creating a restroom space at one end of the workshop for the staff with their own tea, coffee, milk and sugar station. I found a fridge not in use and installed it in the restroom space with a kettle and crockery and a microwave. I invited the support staff to be part of the strategic plan developing the school's vision, mission and values. They were paired off into teams and contributed to this valuable session. One particular comment stands out in my mind that of, "I think we should celebrate special days, like heritage day just as I did when I was at school".*

### 4.5.1 Reflection on Vignette Four

Fullan advocates that moral purpose cannot just be stated, it has to be aligned with leadership actions that make staff feel they are part of the success story and they are in turn energized and inspired to achieve a desired goal (Fullan, 2001). For my leadership to be effective I had to have a sense of purpose, that of making a difference and then had to use strategies to mobilize staff into tackling tough problems. Fullan's words ring true that during troubled times the greatest strength one needs, is a strong sense of moral purpose (Fullan, 2001).

I concur with Nieuwenhuis that moral leadership is a way of being and doing (Nieuwenhuis , 2008). I had to be committed to doing what was right and strive to do what was right.   To support my writing, responses from participants confirm my thoughts and experience. Support staff participants commented on improved maintenance of the school buildings and grounds while another participant cited the gardens and the attention to detail as a visible change Tammy (grade 7) shared, "when I first came here it was almost like a boys' sort of school". Tammy affirmed this view when citing how repainting the school, which was originally red, had resulted in the school feeling a lot calmer. Another positive change appreciated by pupil participants is the renovation of the toilet blocks.   Dennis and Clive (support staff) spoke of their own tea and coffee station as well as the issue of new uniforms annually as making them feel valued. Shan commented on the support staff, "They also had a little shake up because they got away with absolute murder but I think in the end they appreciate what you did.  I mean look what Simon is doing now." Susan spoke of all the changes as being "really positive". "I can't say negative. For example my work area was absolutely ancient and it was a small room with inter-leading sick room, cabinets and stock all in a small room.  I had so much traffic with that and they are all in separate rooms now, which makes my environment so much better and easier to work". Susan spoke of her clean new space as "better to work in, previously it was filthy".

Another perspective added by participants especially found in a primary school setting, is that of the ethic of care advocated by Carol Gilligan (in Adams, 2015). Building a relationship with the support, admin and teaching staff and valuing their contribution re-energised them to work harder. As a woman principal I concur with Gilligan in that I emphasize successful relationships as a means to achieve authenticity amongst the staff and to reach goals. I have enjoyed being free to be me (Adams, 2015). Although in those early years I did not appreciate my freedom as much because I was so frantically busy trying to create order. Renewal includes re-invigorating, re-energising and re-inventing the whole school as a dynamic learning community (Beatty, 2007).

Re-energising the school according to participants occurred once the clear vision was in place and the building alterations were under way. "The obscure building became distinguished". Another shared, "the school is now visible and attractive". "There is attention to detail," shared another participant. A noticeable change has been the energy put into revitalising the sport. Weston supports this statement saying, "I think the school has got sportier since I have been here. More sport activities, art and craft activities are offered." Pupils are competing against neighbouring schools once more. Community perception is that the school is re-energised.

Energising and renewal of the school is shared by Shan who spoke emotionally of her feelings in bringing the staff together. "I think how you have brought the staff together and how you make each and everyone feel they play a part, and you listen to everybody. I think that you've listened. To me that's been major. For me you have made everybody feel they are important and how you have brought the whole staff together. You tell us what is going on whereas before it was all kept secret."

According to data collected re–energising is a result of forward planning, more innovation and showing empathy to staff. Some were resistant to change, "we always did it that way". When I (principal) arrived, that attitude changed. My change in approach resulted in a whole lot of changes. Greg felt that the whole change approach was key. Another viewpoint is that the introduction of a student teacher learnership programme has been a further vehicle in re–energising the school.

A point shared by participants is that the change in uniform was a defining moment, a symbol of re-energising a faltering school. To support my claims, pupil participants reported that they are proud to wear the new school uniform in public places especially when the public ask what school pupils come from. Data collected indicates that the girls' new dress is pretty, the jersey more comfortable and the introduction of tights for colder days appreciated. One pupil participant voiced that he likes to look neat at all times and ensures that he wears his badges correctly because he is proud of his school. These sentiments were echoed by Weston (grade 7), "I like showing other schools and parents who we are, that we are just as good as any other school." Laura (grade 7) explained, "Many people will say your uniform is

beautiful and I feel good because I am wearing the uniform." Meg (grade 7) confirmed that the change to a new school uniform was a positive, "I really like the new school uniform because when I came in, it was quite cold so I mainly wore my jacket and it was quite uncomfortable to wear that. The new jerseys are so very comfortable and the pullover too. I like the new socks and all the sports kit".

**Figure 5 Change**

**Figure 6 Re-energise**

**Figure 7 Refresh**

**4.6 VIGNETTE FIVE – EMPOWER**

*I have first-hand experience of the implementation of professional development. On arriving at the school I knew it would be critical to get buy-in from the staff to enjoy regular professional development sessions in order to move towards becoming a learning school. My aim was to provide stimulating and interesting learning opportunities. I also recognised that it was important to acknowledge and identify past successes and then develop ways to continue our successes and develop areas that needed improvement. Working toward becoming a learning school meant scheduling regular meeting times into the timetable when the extra-mural programme did not impact on staff attendance, a time conducive to building team spirit and framing our new vision while discussing what matters most to us as a learning school.*

*Scheduling Friday afternoons for regular developmental opportunities has become part of what we do, a time together to build meaningful relationships with one another, invite guest speakers, develop shared policy, team building activities and sharing and reflecting on best practice. One particular Friday afternoon session remains vivid in my memory where I told the staff a story depicting our progress in two years and paving the way for the journey ahead.*

*"Let's go back in time, not a big step, just two years in fact. The location is our school found on a quiet leafy street in an upmarket northern suburb. The school is 46 years old, quite striking in fact, with a rich history and was once known for its academic achievement and quest for educational excellence. The school enjoys a diverse population representative of the changing educational landscape. Enrolment is down to 249, well below budget, finances are stretched to the limit and the school is in a very precarious position. A non-payment of school fee culture exists. Despite huge passion there is a deep frustration amongst the management and staff that the school is not attracting pupils. Morale is not what it should be and staff are feeling vulnerable, some even not wanting to come to school. There is a lot of emotion in the building and hurt feelings".*

*"Within two years, the school makes monumental changes both structurally and philosophically. It identifies and recognises the core values of manners, accountability, respect, commitment and honesty which start to permeate the school culture. To get our values and vision into the hearts of people, we talk constantly. We literally evangelize what we stand for.    We adopt a variety of programmes to strengthen our pedagogical skills and knowledge. The results are positive, the school springs back to life. Enrolment picks up slowly. The school reclaims its position in the community. This progress is summed up succinctly by Hall and Simeral (1971) "Change may have been quick but it was not easy. Growth may have been dramatic - but it is not complete. Teaching approaches effective but not refined." Quite simply, despite the many accolades there is still a lot of work to be done".*

*Taking the next step, our mantra that year was 'for each to excel' and I asked the questions:  "Where should our focus be? What more do we need to achieve? How do we keep up the momentum? Can we continue to redefine ourselves as we grow? How can we best build the capacity of our valuable staff? What kind of support does the staff need to help them reach their full potential? (Hall & Simeral, 1971). It is the year of challenging you to critically reflect upon your thinking and your work. I commend you for making such a huge and valuable difference to our school to date, continue to strive for excellence, watch the detail".*

*To start the conversation I put up this slide: "Great teachers look to themselves for answers. Poor teachers look elsewhere. Great teachers have high expectations for their pupils but even higher expectations for themselves (Hall & Simeral, 1971). Poor teachers have high expectations for their pupils but much lower expectations for themselves. Not only that, they have unrealistically high expectations from their colleagues as well (Hall & Simeral, 1971). Success in teaching starts with a focus on ourselves - we are the one variable that we can most easily and most productively influence" (Hall & Simeral,  1971).*

*The conversation ended that day with our purpose statement which is repeated regularly when we gather as a staff, that of being stunningly good at what makes us distinctive: the warm caring and nurturing ethos of a close knit school community where excellent standards are the hallmark of everything we do. The result of*

*continuous professional development is that staff are now working effectively in high performing teams* (Humada- Ludeke, 2013)*.*

### 4.6.1 Reflection on vignette five

The final vignette focuses on professional development. The emphasis is on attaining personal vision by creating a school culture which is characterised by authenticity, empowerment and growth (Parkay, Currie, & Rhodes, 1992). Learning is at the core of continuous improvement and change in a school (Pretorius B. , 2013). As the leader I need to set the best example. I do this not only through studying and reading but also by observing, listening and reflecting. I have come to realise that some of the most powerful moments flow from reflecting on my own experiences. Another valuable source of learning is getting feedback from colleagues who mentor me and whom I respect. I attach enormous value to their input.

Professional development can be defined as a platform for bringing staff together to build their personal capacity, change the school culture and turn the school into a learning community. This is confirmed by a participant stating that the changes achieved are indicative of staff living the motto, 'together we prosper'. The community is not looking at the school in the same negative light any longer but rather is seeing the school as a school of choice once more, confirmed by an increased enrolment. Another participant felt that the upgrade in technology in classrooms had brought about significant and improved changes to teaching and learning while new teachers also brought fresh ideas and an excitement to their teaching. A further participant felt that the uninterrupted contact time with pupils is a positive change. Children are the focus once more.

It is my responsibility to build capacity in the staff by developing skills and knowledge that in turn facilitates reflective discussions and collaboration thus improving teaching and lesson delivery and pupils' learning. My role in the professional development of staff then is critical. Shan tearfully shares her feelings about being more empowered, "Right from the beginning when we knew we were getting a new head Judy  told me  and I thought Oh my word I can't work for Penny. I didn't know

you but I knew of you, how, what you did and I thought I won't make it with Penny. Penny won't like me, but you just made me, from day one, you just made me feel I was worthy, and you just allowed me to be.  You just made such good changes from Grade Seven to  Grade Four.  You always make me feel so special and so valuable. Just that somebody saw me for who I was. So ja, you saw the positive in me and I am very grateful".

Supporting capacity building is echoed by Neville who believes that the "leader gets her team going forward". He states further that prior to my appointment people were pulling in different directions, now staff see the role as making a difference in the lives of children and ultimately the country. Jason supports this point of view explaining that the new leader is a good listener and makes everyone feel valuable and important which has united the staff. According to participants, the staff appreciates my efforts and sympathises with the deep problems and hurts that I had to deal with on arriving in my new position. Shan explained that openness and transparency has been a turning point in garnishing staff support. Openness, meaning that people feel they are important because they know what is happening. Susan admires my ability and energy to "go on and on".

Nicole at a sports prize giving ceremony supports the claim of care and bringing the best out in staff when she shares with the school community, "Before Mrs Alston closes this assembly, I would like to express my gratitude to her for the constant support she has provided since the start of a mandate for improvement imposed on me two years ago. Mrs Alston and I have brushed shoulders, at a variety of sports events and school gatherings while we worked with and in other schools in Durban, without ever knowing that one day we would find ourselves working alongside one another, devoting much of our energy towards a common goal of improving an environment for children. The suggestions put to me on entering this school  for the second time in my career were challenging at first hearing, however I was not prepared for the amount of adjustment that was required or the many hours that would be needed to make it work. Fourteen years down the line and little did I know that Mrs Alston had in fact done her homework and was well aware of what she could challenge me with, and with confidence that I would do what it takes.

In saying this however, I would not have held up so strong, on the days when the chips were down and when all was thrown into the dust or felt lost to the wind, without her backing and firm belief that a breakthrough was around the corner. Thank you Mrs Alston for realising the drive and passion, and where it could fit into your plan – the children of this school have you to thank for anything and everything positive that they are experiencing with the extra mural programme at this school".

There was dissension and little sense of shared purpose on my arrival. My reform mandate was to clean up. Change was initiated in a response to disturbing and dysfunctional events. Some staff realized that change was needed. Over time everyone both inside and outside of the school, saw the change (Clandinin & Connelly, 1998).

Professional development gives staff the opportunity of reimaging their own professional lives. From such a standpoint I believe change is then softer, less of an imposition and can be undertaken with a willingness to listen, to negotiate as we move forward together (Clandinin & Connelly, 1998).


**5.Conclusion**

I do not like being in the lime light. I record my experiences as they might just add meaning to another. My light shines brightly working behind the scenes, rather at school, rather trying to make a difference. I do not need recognition for the work I do; intrinsically I gain so much fulfilment from seeing positive change and the difference that it makes in the school community. Success is not mine alone; I cannot take credit for improving the school's effectiveness. It is a collaborative effort, as a staff we celebrate success collectively. For me there is no meaning in a title but rather being a principal is a responsibility. Leadership comes from deep inside my heart. I have an overwhelming responsibility in my position of stewardship, that of taking care of the school in my tenure as principal. This means I drive the change that is needed to improve the school. I have come to realise that being principal means I am essential to the purpose of the school which is to develop core values within the school community that help us move towards change and improvement (Fullan, 2001; Williams & Richardson, 2010).

Bringing in the concept of stewardship means I am accountable. It is my responsibility to have an insider's perspective of everything that happens at the school that could impact our vision (Fullan, 2001; Williams & Richardson, 2010). As steward, I use strategies that empower my staff and so provide professional development opportunities (Williams & Richardson, 2010). As the steward, I have the responsibility of creating a learning community which will support necessary change to improve and maintain a high standard of teaching and learning (Williams & Richardson, 2010). The staff, through professional development activities, is invited to co-create the vision and engage in practices that reflect our vision (Williams & Richardson, 2010). It is my responsibility to develop stewards of education within the staff. I like to believe that I understand my role in the educational process and carry it out with a steady and devoted effort (Williams & Richardson, 2010).

At a recent staff meeting this sentiment was brought home to me when I was given a bunch of flowers from the staff with the following message written by George Bernard Shaw (Forbes, 2015)*, "I am of the opinion that my life belongs to the whole community and as I live it is my privilege to do for it whatever I can. I want to be thoroughly used up when I die, for the harder I work, the more I love. I rejoice in life for its own sake. Life is no brief candle to me, it is a splendid torch which I've got a hold of for the moment and I want to make it burn as brightly a possible before handing it on to future generations."*

Serving, humbleness, passion and enthusiasm tinged with joy is contagious and I underestimated how these God given gifts influence the school community. Serving is not doing what staff want but rather providing what they need in the long term in the best interests of all (Hunter, 2004). Authentic leadership in my opinion is built on service and sacrifice equated to the 'Law of the Harvest' – you reap what you sow (Hunter, 2004). Being a principal means having the ability to love and serve. Then God has the ability to work in the lives of both the staff and the principal (Hunter, 2004). As I bow out and move into private education I should imagine the story of the school will be reshaped once again (Clandinin & Connelly, 1998).

# CHAPTER FIVE

# DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

## 5.1 INTRODUCTION

This study was guided by the following research questions:

What processes and approaches were used in turning around a dysfunctional school to becoming fully functional again?

This overarching question was divided into four sub-questions:

*Sub Question 1.* What processes were put in place to initiate change at the school?

*Sub Question 2.* What was the focal point of the turnaround strategy used in the case study school?

*Sub Question 3.* How was a moral leadership approach adopted and what was the outcome of the leadership approach?

*Sub Question 4.* What lessons could be learnt from it?

In this chapter I will provide the findings in an attempt to answer these questions. As an auto-ethnographic study, this chapter will reflectively integrate my own perceptions and experiences with those of the research participants and the literature.

As a newly appointed principal I was acutely aware of the enormous responsibility and accountability of leading the school through change. I was tasked with and felt a moral obligation to bring about significant change within the context of the school and its organizational culture. This was a daunting challenge and I felt moments of doubt on this uncomfortable journey of self-discovery that I did not have the necessary skill to lead the school through change. However, the magnitude of the

challenge soon ignited my competitive spirit. There was a mammoth job to be done. The real test of my leadership ability was about to unfold but I believed I had the faith that I could make a difference.

Napoleon Bonaparte once said; "*Leaders deal in hope*" (Forbes, 2015). The power of hope was all I had. I had a tough challenge on my hands which required courage and resilience. This reflexive study has been a journey of self-discovery, in tough times I discovered who I really am and I also discovered the incredible power of the human spirit and the true meaning of tenacity and perseverance (Pretorius, 2013).

On reflection, in terms of my growth as a principal, I could not have made a better move than to the school to which I was appointed. The magnitude and scope of the situations I found myself in and had to deal with accelerated my learning about myself and dealing with the change process. It forced me to develop my leadership philosophy and apply it.  My skills and ability have been subjected to severe and trying times, however the benefits I derived from a personal development point of view are immeasurable. My knowledge of leadership and change has broadened significantly. It is my hope that my narrative text communicates a holistic picture of my experiences. I have connected pieces of data together to provide a broad view of my leadership and the change experience (Pretorius , 2013).


## 5.2 WHERE DID I FIND MYSELF?

I became a principal and quickly realised that the shoes I wore were much too large for me. I spent long hours walking in these uncomfortable shoes consumed by the demands of my role. Initially I walked aimlessly in my shoes as I struggled to make sense of what I can only describe as chaos, hand in hand with implementing improvement efforts, which were paradoxically at times misunderstood and welcomed.  I recall many sleepless nights, tossing and turning, keeping a notebook alongside my bed, writing thoughts during the dead of night shrouded in uncertainty and hopelessness with regards to the magnitude of change that was necessary to get the school back to becoming effective once more.  Yet I felt compelled to make a difference, I knew I had to improve the existing culture of the school and questioned if I could fill the gaping holes ever present in my large shoes. My philosophical roots

are deeply grounded in servant-leadership and the ability to develop human potential. This deep seated belief guided my practice and influenced my leadership lens (Nieuwenhuis , 2007; Humada- Ludeke, 2013).

No amount of training could have prepared me for the situation I faced walking into - a faltering school as a new principal, and the loneliness of the role. On reflection I perhaps did not show the necessary respect for some of the school's traditions and rituals. I felt overwhelmed by just how much work had to be done. Reflexively I have come to learn that not every issue needs to be addressed, one has to prioritise matters and choose which ones to tackle. When in doubt, it is best to listen, reflect and take time to formulate an answer (what I call the 24 hour principle), in this way one gains credibility. I also had to clearly define in my own mind what I stood for. What were the non-negotiables? As I grew into my role as principal I discovered my own professional values and hold them dear.  I also had to remind myself often "I can do this!" Mostly however, I had to dig deep to find the courage, wisdom and strength to lead and put on a brave face during those early days.

While my role and position as principal was relevant and important, I came to realise that leadership was broader than my position as principal. I was the facilitator and my leadership was distributed amongst staff. I placed an emphasis on interactive sense making with the aim of disentangling the complex context within which I had to work. Meaningful interactions with staff  evoked intense feelings and were characterised by emotions which I came to realise are the heart of leadership and are not to be discarded as an annoying side effect as I first felt. The desired working conditions to operate professionally were missing, even threatened, and as a result the staff were working in micro political groups to restore desired working conditions. These micro political groups carried an emotional load, especially as educationally desired conditions were lost. Therefore, my role was to focus on the micro political perspectives on issues of power, control and influence as part of my sense making and acting in my role as principal.

I became the gate keeper, as leading a school brings with it moral, political and emotional agendas which corroborates the views of Kelchtermans, Piot and  Ballet (2011). On one hand I faced the outside world in the form of the school governing body, which in a sense is also part of the inside world of the school as they employ

staff, the national and provincial policymakers mostly in the form of administrative procedures, rules and demands and lastly the local community connected to the school in the form of parents. All these actors addressed me with their outside demands, wishes and concerns. I remember listening to complaint after complaint from issues of discipline and bullying to dangerous and neglected structural problems. The criticism was endless. They sapped me of my energy as I realised the enormity of what I had taken on. I soon understood I had to discern and close out implicit and explicit demands and requirements in order to survive.

On the other side of the gate is the inside of the school, made up of staff and pupils . The expectations of the staff and pupils of me as principal and gatekeeper was to provide the necessary conditions for the smooth functioning of the school (Kelchtermans, Piot, & Ballet, 2011).  I learned that ideal working conditions include staff expecting the principal always to be on their side, expecting a sense of predictability and control with little pressure for permanent change. As gate keeper, I was expected to move between both the external and internal worlds which have particular expectations and demands about what education looks like and how it can be achieved. I had to react to external demands, pressures and ideas while still being expected to take on leadership initiatives, facilitating and supporting agendas within the school. The inside world expected me  to act on their behalf,  while at the same time as  the gate keeper  I had to be  the go-between , moving between the inside and outside, between different actors on the outside  and different groups of staff members on the inside. My experience, as Kelchtermans, Piot and  Ballet (2011) suggest, is that the principal constantly balances between the two sides/worlds, sometimes leaning one way, sometimes the other. The task of gatekeeper is physically and mentally demanding as I negotiated and interacted with different groups and individuals and is at the same time emotionally draining with uncertainty and conflict.

 Christi (1998) and van Deventer & Kruger (2011) corroborate my experience that being principal means I am also responsible for the functioning and management of the school. This workload as well as its social and interactive nature has a strong emotional significance. I recognised early in my leadership that I could be caught in a web of conflicting loyalties. The school's reason for existence lies in the education of

the pupils and giving them the best chance of success and to develop as human beings. I had to fall back on being ethically responsible for not only delivering a high standard of teaching and learning but also for the development of the pupils. Every discussion, decision and reflection revolved and still revolves around the best interests of the pupils. All these discussions are not technical but value laden. This was the heart of the pressure on me as decisions and choices have moral implications. Doing the right thing can be difficult and I felt fearful at times, even uncertain. On reflection, I do experience a high level of satisfaction being principal as I have developed a professional understanding of leadership and change. This self-awareness does not provide me with answers about what to do but it does allow for a more professional judgement on which action to take when faced with a difficult situation.

In acting out my role of gate keeper, I am acting out my own definition of myself as principal and inviting outsiders to recognise this definition. I could no longer be the teacher amongst teachers if I wanted to reach into being principal, so I had to endure the position of loneliness at times. There is no other member in the school in the same position as me. I have the same need to belong and be part of a team; yet structural loneliness makes this a problem. I felt a sense of pressure, perhaps self-inflicted, that in the end I am ultimately responsible. I learnt to share and enjoy the pleasure of belonging at times which is a positive feeling but I was acutely aware of the risk of being ultimately responsible for things I had delegated to others.

My findings concur with van Deventer and Kruger's ( 2011) that the principal is seen as the organisational architect, initiating and orchestrating change, someone who is also responsible for leading professional development and demonstrating values to guide relationships.


## 5.3 HOW DID I MANAGE CHANGE?

As Fullan (2001) advocates, becoming a principal has been a profound experience. It has afforded me first-hand knowledge and insight into the intricacies of just how complex yet attainable the change process really is. My school has become the platform where I have implemented and integrated the underpinnings of a learning

school using the lens of Nieuwenhuis' theoretical model (2007) and my philosophical viewpoint and guiding principles on servant–leadership. I have gleaned invaluable insight into the significance of the change process. My memory as a novice teacher is that the principal's role was more about being a good manager, with little to do with leadership and more to do with unlocking doors and managing routines. However, this role has been redefined and I am now expected to provide and create a supportive culture where staff share challenges and successes in a way that is mindful of effective and ineffective classroom practice and in so doing, improving teaching and learning.

Furthermore, there was an expectation from the governing body of the school and the parent body that I should challenge ineffective practices. In other words, challenge the status quo which had permeated the complex organizational school culture for so long. I underestimated the magnitude and extent of the change that was necessary to keep our doors open.  Any reasonable chance of success meant removing potential barriers such as  the absence of collaboration, low levels of trust and  poor communication in order to increase staff readiness to engage in an effective change process. I ask myself the question often: How did my vision overcome my uncertainty to make much needed change? Simply put, I solved my uncertainty by interacting with the staff, parents and pupils - relationship building began.

The major theme emerging from the interviews of participants in this study was that of change and the management thereof. As the manager and leader I had an idea of how to manage the necessary changes and my own perceptions about change but what really happened provides a reflective lens.  I concur with Fullan (2001) as it was my experience that changes in a school can be rapid and nonlinear in some instances and at times have the potential for creative breakthroughs. Like Nieuwenhuis  (2008) I experienced two main thoughts on managing change. The first was that the school was relatively accepting and was able to adapt when circumstances demanded change and the second was that parts of the school were resistant to change. I anticipated and experienced a willingness and excitement as well as pockets of resistance to change. Change was both adaptive and disruptive while the conditions required for change were at times enabled and at times

hindered. Like Nieuwenhuis (2008), I found that organisational change cannot only be understood from a school's development perspective but change is based on individual assumptions, beliefs and values that affect the attitiude of the individual towards change. The key to long lasting change in a school then is not only achieving technical compliance but achieving substantive compliance, thus ensuring deep seated systemic change and a change in underlying peceptions, values and beliefs of the staff .

## 5.5 THIS IS WHAT HAPPENED – A REFLECTIVE LENS

Through reflective practice I continuously ponder my leadership. Using reflective practice brings clarity to my development as a leader of a school that was once termed non-viable. Experience has taught me that thinking can be one, two or even three dimensional depending on the reflective lens. During that first year at the school I used a one dimensional approach to my thinking. I was very hard on myself, worrying about the changes I needed to make and just how I was going to address the many issues I faced as principal. I was extremely anxious, stressed, overwhelmed at times and felt inadequate. Reflective practice allowed me moments of insight that offered clarity into my leadership. Through reflective practice I realised that change was not solely my responsibility.

What I did not realise or anticipate in my ignorance of that first year, being a newly appointed novice principal, was that while development and growth are ideal for change, mourning and sorrow are also every bit part of the change process. I was not emotionally tied to the school. I saw the necessary changes in a clinical way devoid of emotion. In hindsight, staff grieved when assumptions and routines that they once took for granted were no longer of value. Some staff reacted with disbelief, sadness even anger. Looking through a reflective lens I have come to an understanding that I overlooked a crucial fact: patterns of behaviour create continuity and provide comfort. In trying to understand staff reaction to change it is the psychological not just the logical that matters. We become attached to both positive and negative patterns and are often reluctant to abandon patterns even when we dislike them. I found a staff clinging to the hopelessness of our situation, some

fiercely resistant to changes that promised to address the very circumstances that distressed them the most  Some staff decided to leave.

Feedback from participants indicates the effect of change on the staff. There was willingness once more for staff to participate and add value, their input was sought. Participants also reported better organisation as a positive change.  What became evident from the interviews is that staff who felt that they could not buy into the change process left the school. I realise now that the initial changes to procedures, routines and practices I instigated made staff feel insecure and inadequate, a view which is corroborated by Evans (2001). I am ashamed to admit I probably threatened staff competence initially, especially as they saw their performance as   exemplary where they had exercised their skills in a particular way for a long time. The staff members were required to abandon what they knew how to do and adopt something they did not know how to do while having confidence in a leader who had not yet earned their trust. My intention was that change is made for the betterment of everyone in the school; however, change does bring about conflict. Some staff members aligned themselves with the changes I introduced, but for others old wounds were re-opened. Disagreements, personal hurts and jealousy surfaced and awakened painful memories. Teaching attracts people into the field because it offers stability and continuity and I unknowingly challenged both.

I also believe that the school was not expecting immediate successes and was not necessarily ready for me.  Successes were reserved for those schools around me , and although never verbalised, a powerful  feeling permeated within the school and in the broader community  that we were second best. We enjoyed some immediate wins, getting articles into the local newspaper, gardening, painting, tidying up the school and outsourcing to a company to deep clean the classrooms.  Suddenly some staff members became more comfortable with the change process, evident through changed staff behaviour, improved ownership and the ability to arrive at consensus in the best interests of the pupils in our care.  I gained increased support from the staff and slowly evidence emerged that we were moving in a healthier direction.

**5.6 DID I ASSUME THAT STAFF WOULD RESIST CHANGES OR DID I ASSUME THAT PEOPLE ARE ADAPTIVE AND KEEN TO CHANGE?**

As early as 1513, Nicolo Machiavelli, author of *Prince* wrote, "*It must be considered that there is nothing more difficult to carry out nor more dangerous to handle, than to initiate a new order of things*" (Forbes, 2015). At least five hundred years of commentary exists on the difficulty of change and innovation. It was no different for me. I assumed that there would be some resistance to change, I anticipated that! On the other hand, I expected the staff in general to be keen to change. The difficulty proved to be the pace and adaptability of change.

My findings correspond with Fullan (2001) and Sergiovanni (1992) that a principal cannot hope to implement change without persuading staff that it is necessary, and I did just that. I had to make the staff feel that they were part of the school's success story. The first step was the recognition and readiness that practices in the school needed reviewing. This meant that I had to apply pressure to ensure critical changes took place rapidly in some instances as urgent problems had to be addressed. I had to change established practices in favour of new and better routines and procedures, building a vision for the school and establishing core values. I needed to offer support. I came to understand that if people are to accept-let alone embrace change; they must understand its why, what, and how: why they cannot simply preserve the status quo and keep doing what they have been doing; and how the change will take place. So I applied pressure, asking "Why do you do it that way?" which in hindsight was an assertion of my power. Like Fullan (2001) I do not advocate a top down style of leadership, however, some critical instances did not allow time for all staff to buy-in or for them to get over their unhappiness.

Reflexively buy-in has to be built over time and the building began when I made the case for change. To make the case for change meant that I did not blame , criticise staff or make blanket condemnations of wrong doing in staff meetings but rather challenged staff to face the reality that we were a non-viable and failing school. Implementation for change meant having candid and uncomfortable discussions. I had the formidable task of outlining the issues and challenges we faced as a school and the risk of continuing with those current ways. At first staff members did not

believe me. They could not face what they knew in their hearts, that the school was failing, enrolment had dropped off drastically and we were no longer the school of choice in the area. School fee collection rates were poor which meant we could not keep our doors open to meet our expenses for the balance of that first year. It took the results of an independent survey given to the broader community to convince the staff that change was critical for our survival. I vividly recall at a feedback presentation, the raw emotion as some staff members sobbed, saying that they never realised just how fragile the situation was.

After this harsh reality check and an initial connection with staff, I felt I might have something to build upon. While the relationship was still evolving and tenuous, I actually felt there was a sense of readiness and so I began building a relationship of trust with the staff. I think I sent shockwaves through the staff as I anticipated correctly that the changes we desperately needed to make would result in staff turnover. Many staff members had enjoyed a long tenure at the school, their first teaching post in many cases and interestingly the parent community made no comment on the staff turnover.

Just as Greenleaf (1977) theorises, as servant-leader I made it clear from the start that it was my duty to care and support the staff. They had been left out on a limb for close on two years and I would go so far as to say that they  had been emotionally neglected, left to their own devices. It was hard at first to 'act out' that care because staff members were nervous and sceptical. It took time to earn moral authority. Support of the staff ranged from development training opportunities to continuous encouragement which reduced the anxiety of change. I had to work very hard confirming that I was not only committed to change but more importantly committed to the staff as well - committed enough to work with the staff, to roll up my sleeves and do the 'scut work' as Reeves (2008) suggests, assisting and supporting the staff in the initial difficult steps towards change. This ethic of care and support for the staff is reflected in feedback from participants when asked if the changes had impacted on their role at the school. Responses ranged from appreciation for new and improved cleaner working conditions, improved communication and transparency of

information and the overwhelming feeling of care and trust resulting from delegated responsibilities.

Data collected also confirms how participants perceived changes, and again responses ranged from how the school has come alive again to staff feeling more comfortable in the work place. Another theme that emerged from the data indicated participants' assigned value to the changes. One value resulted in staff feeling more comfortable in the work place. Another value assigned by participants was the necessity for staff change. The pupils' interviewed triangulate these responses when they voiced their opinion of the staff being more helpful than before.

So we celebrated success and started to find the familiar in the new. However, reflexively the change process for staff was complex, both emotionally and mentally. As Fullan (2001) says, the staff had to be helped to link the new with the old, to not see the future as detached from the past but as related to it. It was my responsibility to guide the staff,   to see the future as fulfilling the traditional values of the school in new ways. We worked through staff development opportunities, identifying special characteristics of the school and our core values for which we were once well known. for. As leader; I had to embody the change and create the bridge between the old and the new, to help staff relinquish what they held dear so that they could move on. This could not be forced.  Looking back I can see that my open vision for the school emphasized continuity so wherever possible the school's traditional principles and qualities were stressed in staff meetings, management meetings, grade head meetings and newsletters to parents. This I think, helped staff to link the new with the old which was comforting.

As Nieuwenhuis (2007) suggests, the focal point in the turnaround strategy of the school was the development of a shared purpose, identifying shared values and building a vision before any other changes could be contemplated towards becoming a learning school. The school had an outdated vision and mission statement. It had lost its vision, its purpose; there were no clearly defined goals to work towards.  My experience, like Autry's (2001), is that values describe how staff  and pupils relate to one another in a school as they pursue their mission to accomplish their purpose. Values had not been articulated and it was my first responsibility to guide the

development of these values. Nieuwenhuis (2007) advocates, adopting shared values guided and directed the school in improving its functioning. To begin the journey towards a value driven school, I facilitated opportunities involving staff and pupils in identifying what values the school should use as the core of our operation. Once an agreed framework was developed, it started to permeate all aspects of school life. Staff, pupils and parents began to slowly but actively support and model shared values.

Although the school had always been known as a caring family school, the values underlying the school's ethos were identified as: manners, accountability, respect, commitment and honesty. What was evident from feedback interviews with staff and pupils was that the introduction of a values programme was a significant event that marked a change in the school and relationships within the school. With an emphasis on family values, pupil participants spoke of their pride in the school which is marked by a strong ethic of care. The values wall stands out as significant amongst participants where the five core values are visible to both pupils and staff. Feedback from interviews indicates that parents have noticed the stand the school is taking on living the five core values.

Like Teddlie and Stringfield (2007), I concur that consistently creating a safe and positive school climate and culture is characterized by a shared vision which has a positive effect on pupil and staff attitudes towards the school. Furthermore self-dignity and self-confidence are essential components for personal development and progress in a values driven school. These two elements are required for collaboration and to embrace and accept change. A values driven school develops autonomy and responsibility essential for reflective thinking. A broader aim is that ultimately developing values driven school assists the school community to acknowledge their dependence on society and encourages pupils, staff and parents to contribute more to society (Nieuwenhuis , 2007).

I have also come to learn over the last five years that staff progress from loss to commitment better when they have personal contact with the principal. I made and still have a routine of walking the school twice a week, popping into every classroom and touching base with the teaching staff, I send personal emails of thanks for work well done, compliment staff in meetings and make every effort to keep my office door

open for staff to pop in and touch base with me. I breathe and talk the school's values even before the ink is dried on the paper.

Perhaps in the beginning I was impatient to get on with progress and to see implementation. I have since come to realize that a clear explanation of the rational necessity for the change works best and then appropriate combinations of carrot and stick to manoeuvre or, if necessary, compel compliance.  Initially when effecting change I did not give clear enough reason. In hindsight, I overestimated my influence and underrated the realities of staff adapting to change. It is essential to convey two messages when initiating change. The first is, "We are in a serious situation, the risk of inaction will be detrimental to the school and we must make changes." The second is, "I value you as a person and your contribution is important. Collectively we can help one another get where we need to go to make a difference in this school."

Thus I found myself  straddling   the line between pressure and support, continuity and change , confirming my  commitment to staff  to accomplish  change and  urging them to act. I did  not see my authority as principal as having power over the staff, rather I saw it as a means to fulfil a larger vision that takes into account the needs of most . Viewed in this way, I like to think that support underpins my leadership and this is built upon service and sacrifice. Like Fullan (1992),  my experience was that "pressure without support leads to resistance and alienation; support without pressure leads to drift or waste of resources." Extending me to appreciate staff is a characteristic of servant–leadership, as is taking the time to listen and above all giving others credit for work well done.

## 5.7 WHAT DOES CHANGE MEAN IN THE CONTEXT OF A SCHOOL?

Nieuwenhuis (2008) corroborates my experience that  the  changes in the school affected  systems, processes and structures . It involved a radical reorientation in the way the  school operated. This included relooking at the school's mission and values as well as restructuring systems and  rightsizing staff . The school was trapped in an old world ideology where the human and personal element was largely neglected. Also,  the school was inherently conservative and resistent to innovation. I found

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myself in a situation where I had to deal with a multitude of changes from organisational processes, to systems, to structures, to organisation wide change.

Change took place simultaneously in different parts of the school, processes, procedures, systems and structures and at different levels of complexity. While the school gained in the change process in one part, it lagged behind in other areas. Unlike Fullan (2001), I did not plan all the changes according to a blue print. This does not mean that I approached change in an unplanned manner but the traditional notion of planning did not always fit the realities of the management of the school. What was called for instead was a strategic approach where the values of the school were defined. In so doing, the staff came to an understanding of deeper change issues than merely accepting the technical compliance.

It was not always possible to predict how change would take place or the underlying dynamics of the process, a view supported by both Nieuwenhuis (2008) and Buckingham  and Coffman (1999). Key substantive change lies within people. My quest was to develop the potential of the staff from within so that the school could develop, change and improve. Achieving change meant initiating a strong staff development foundation which prepares the staff to deal with the unexpected and to develop the potential of staff members to adapt to new and ever changing demands. It was about changing the climate of the school so that the culture could change.  My purpose was for strategic renewal which involved promoting, accommodating and utilising new knowledge and innovative behaviour in order to bring about change in the school's core competencies. Strategic change dealt with staff member's assumptions, values and beliefs as well as their competencies and skills. As principal I was aware of not being attuned to possibilities within the staff and did not want to use compliance to get the staff to do what needed to be done and in so doing create pockets of passive resistance which leads to inertia.

Understanding the assumptions of the staff and working to unpack these assumptions explored the potential to address the challenges of change. The turning point was developing shared values, not my values as the principal but deciding on a set of agreed–upon values which infused a spirit of purpose where staff worked towards building the school around these shared values. I sought to find out from staff what they valued most about the school and what needed to be discarded.

Like Nieuwenhuis (2008), to achieve substantive change I needed to continue to focus on the personal dimension of change. Creating shared values, assumptions and beliefs helps achieve substantive change. My vision was that of turning the school into a learning organisation based on continuous monitoring, improvement, professional development, dialogue and collaboration. Through my reflexive lens I come to an understanding that an effective leader must be capable of identifying and solving problems have the capacity to manage change and development, and build a positive school climate where there is respect between all stake holders. Interviews with participants revealed that the school had over time become unproductive and toxic. The staff was fragmented, the purpose of serving the pupils lost to the goal of serving adults, there were negative values and a sense of hopelessness.

Feedback from free-flowing interviews sheds light on how participants viewed and felt about change. The initial process to effect change was the appointment of a new principal who participants felt, as an outsider, could look at the school through a fresh lens. What became evident from the interviews was that long serving staff had been part of many strategic planning sessions over the years and had not seen the school's vision put into practice until now. Participants reported that great strides have been made and their responses triangulate the data on a servant-leadership approach with comments about the principal leading by example without expecting reward and motivating the staff. The impact of change is an underlying theme which Fullan (2001) refers to as reculturing. Reculturing meant seeking, critically assessing and selectively incorporating new ideas and practices.

The following figures serve to corroborate evidence supporting my claim of turning around a dysfunctional/faltering school into becoming fully functional again.

**Table 1 Enrolment from 2013 - 2018**

| Year | Boys | Girls | Total |
|------|------|-------|-------|
| 2013 | 143 | 144 | 287 |
| 2014 | 149 | 158 | 307 |
| 2015 | 165 | 153 | 318 |
| 2016 | 162 | 160 | 322 |
| 2017 | 182 | 157 | 339 |
| 2018 | 205 | 185 | 390 |

**Table 2 Audited financials of revenue and expenditure from 2011 – 2016**

| Year | Revenue | Expenditure | Surplus (Deficit) |
|------|---------|-------------|-------------------|
| 2011 | 4 912 425 | 4 975 921 | (63 496) |
| 2012 | 5 529 226 | 5 495 121 | 34 105 |
| 2013 | 6 138 403 | 6 115 291 | 23 112 |
| 2014 | 7 070 129 | 6 741 905 | 328 224 |
| 2015 | 8 336 821 | 7 951 015 | 385 806 |
| 2016 | 19 682 400 | 9 211 027 | 10 425 886 |

**Table 3. Increase in staffing inclusive of governing body and state staff.**

| Year | Number of staff |
|------|-----------------|
| 2013 | 23 |
| 2014 | 23 |
| 2015 | 26 |
| 2016 | 30 |
| 2017 | 34 |
| 2018 | 36 |

## 5.8 CONCLUDING THE JOURNEY

Given that the characteristics of Nieuwenhuis' (2007) learning school and Robert Greenleaf's (1977) servant leadership can be learned , they provide a road map for newly appointed principals who are at the start of their leadership journey. This auto-ethnographic study might prove useful for newly appointed principals leading change in faltering schools. However, further research is required for more auto - ethnographic studies to gain a better emic perspective on change in schools and the management thereof.

The challenges I faced as a result of this experience offer insight into my personalised research experience as a principal of a faltering school. The use of a qualitative study meant that I was able to analyse my leadership from many vantage points which have moulded me professionally. I am grateful that I was able to make a difference and that my leadership was a catalyst for change. I used servant-leadership to construct my own leadership path and was able to explain my story from a personalised frame of reference. Delving into oneself is both difficult and productive. While I experienced both success and failure, I remained focused on understanding others and fostering meaningful change in the school setting. Throughout the reflective practice, this self-study dominated my thoughts and time. Putting critical moments into perspective was a challenge for me. Five years on this journey of principal leadership has helped me develop perspective as a way to ground my focus and to continue attempting to positively affect school culture and facilitate change through the lens of servant leadership. The journey has been a valuable one.

I assumed I had an objective view of the world but I realise I can never see the world accurately. I am constantly constructing and reconstructing meaning. In fact one could argue that the data I collected and worked with is ambiguous. I came to realise that perceptions are very powerful and are determined by our biases. Biases can get in the way of seeing the world differently. I also discovered that I had biases of which I was unaware. On reflection, the only solution was to step into uncertainty and celebrate it, to encourage diversity of thought which opened up possibilities and cooperation amongst staff members.

I have also come to an understanding that in the change process I initially focused on efficiency and not always creativity. Being a school principal can be equated to the theatre: taking the school community on a journey and on that journey, leading by example, admitting mistakes and seeing quality in others as the story unfolds.

I have grown enormously as a result of conducting this auto-ethnography study, a personal journey which provided me with the opportunity of collecting data through reflexive practice. My leadership experience these last five years has been exhausting and terrifying yet fulfilling and insightful. It has provided me with a wealth of knowledge and experience that will continue to shape my leadership. My experience will support the new leadership role I am taking on as I bow out of public into private education.

I acknowledge being an ambitious person who wants the best for the pupils in my care. These five years, as a result, have been a battle to find a balance between my professional and personal life. The former has won hands down. I have seen what can work and the many changes that have taken place as evidenced through my experiences at the school and the evidence collected from participants in this study.

Has the sacrifice and hard work been worth it I ask myself? The answer comes from one of the school neighbours: "It is good to see the school come back to life again, for so long nothing happened! "

## 5.9   RECOMMENDATIONS

This study had several findings related to the primary research question: what processes and approaches were used in turning around a dysfunctional school to becoming fully functional again? The characteristics from this study's theoretical model (figure 2) as well as Greenleaf's (1977) servant leadership have shown the characteristics required/needed  to turn aorund a dysfunctional school.

The first recommendation to emerge from the conclusions of this study is that every school principal should lead with integrity, have a moral purpose and a clear understanding of his/her core values in order to make a difference in the lives of pupils and staff. Principals must have the ability to build relationships with staff as moral purpose and organisational successes are inter-connected (Nieuwenhuis, 2007).

The second recommendation is to build a vision around shared values. These clear values give purpose to what the school is trying to achieve, an understanding of why those are its goals and how it plans to reach the shared gaols (Nieuwenhuis, 2007).

The third recommendation of this study is that principals must have an understanding of the change process in order to effect school change and lead it better. Nieuwenhuis explains organisational change as that which affects systems, processes and structures in a school (Nieuwenhuis , 2008).

The fourth and final recommendation is that principals who want to develop a learning school must build the capacity of staff and create knowledge sharing opportunities implementing programmes that will enrich the teaching experience of staff (Nieuwenhuis , 2007)

I found auto-ethnography a valid methodology to learn about leadership in turning around a dysfunctional school culture. This self-study provided me with the opportunity to look inside myself in an attempt to understand my leadership actions. My failure and success has allowed me to focus on a deeper understanding of the change process in a school.

My initial view of leadership and what it was about, while a deputy principal, changed a great deal when I became principal.  My view today is different to what it was five years ago. I have learned that leadership has nothing to do with position, title or status. Leadership is about influence which has to be earned. One gains influence by leading with humility, consistency, competence, compassion and fairness. Leadership is a position of responsibility and not a right and what a privilege it is to lead. Influence comes from the strength of your spirit, the power of your ideas, humility and the ability to capture the heart and minds of people (Greenleaf, 1977).

## 5.10 CONCLUSION

I started out this study by claiming that one of the most important tasks facing the newly elected government in 1994 was to rebuild the education system. Many principals are still waiting for the government to make the changes that they would like to see happening in schools. If the journey narrated in this study has shown me anything, then it is that the change we so desperately need is not in the hands of government, but in our own hands. It is crucial to take responsibility at a school level. We need to embrace the challenges and opportunities that we face and ride the storm. We need to muster the skills and abilities of the staff and pupils and help them to work with us towards the dream that we call our vision. The time is now!

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**Annexure 1 Free flowing narrative interview schedule grade 7**



## Interview Schedule

Free flowing Narrative Interviews: Grade Seven Pupils

Dear

I am doing research on our school. When we do research we try to find evidence that will help us solve a problem. Just like a detective who investigates a crime and needs to find evidence of who did it. The research that I am doing is about our school and how it is changing. Because you have been here for more than three years I think you can help me a great deal by telling me about the things that you think have changed. So my first question is:

1. Can you think of anything in the school that has changed over the last three years?

2. Do you think that things are better after they have changed? Why do you say so?

3. Can you think of anything else that has changed? (probe for more examples)

4. How do you like our new school uniform?

5. How do you feel wearing your school uniform at the shopping mall? Why?

6. If people say good things about our school, how do you feel?

7. Do people say good things about the school? Why do you think they like about our school?

8. How do you feel when people say bad things about our school?

9. Can you recall something bad that somebody said about our school? Why do you think that they said it?

10. What is the one thing that you love most about our school?

11. I'm going to say three words. Which one do you think best fits our school: kindness, caring, respect? Why did you choose that word?

12. How would you best describe the school in one word?

13. What word do you think best describes your teacher?

14. What word do you think best describes me as the principal?

**Annexure 2 Conversational interview schedule for staff and governing body**



<u>Interview Schedule</u>
<u>Conversational Interviews</u>

Dear

Thank you for agreeing to this interview. I am collecting information for research purposes about our school and the many changes that have taken place. Because of your close association with the school for more than three years, you are able to be of great help by telling me about the changes you have noticed during your tenure as a governing body member. Take as much time as you need. I'll listen first, I won't interrupt and I may take a couple of notes that I'll ask you questions about later.

1. To begin, if we think back over the last number of years, what changes in our school come to mind?

2. Were these changes necessary?

3. Which of these changes do you think had the greatest impact on the school? The impact could have been positive or negative. Why do you think the change that you are talking about had such an impact?

4. Does any other event stand out as being particularly significant?

5. What is your perception of the school?

6. Has your perception changed over the last three years? If so, why has your perception changed?

7. Have the changes you mentioned contributed to the school's progress? In what way would you say they have done so?

The types of probing questions I will ask later might include:

1. You mentioned earlier… Could you describe in detail what happened?

2. You mentioned…  Can you provide a specific example of that?

3. You talked about… Can you describe that event in more detail?

4. It sounds like you are saying…

**Annexure 3 Parent consent form**



**Department: Humanities Education**

16 June 2016

Dear Parent,

**RESEARCH INTO SCHOOL CHANGE**

I am currently enrolled as a student at the University of Pretoria, Faculty of Education studying towards a M.Ed. in Curriculum and Instructional Design and Development. As part of the degree, I am involved with a research project titled: Reflection on Leadership - turning around a dysfunctional school culture: An Auto-Ethnography.

The purpose of my research is to establish the way in which the school has changed in recent years, and the role that certain stakeholders have played in this change. The insights gained through my research may assist other school principals in understanding more about educational transformation.

Your son/daughter has been selected as a possible participant in the research because of the changes he/she has witnessed and the valuable insights he/she might share. This letter serves as a request, asking permission for your son/daughter to participate in the research. Should you consent, I will arrange an initial interview with your son/daughter in respect of the above topic. The interview will take place at a time and venue convenient to your son/daughter. The interview will not conflict or interfere with school activities and/or classroom contact time. The duration of the interview will be no more than twenty to thirty minutes. The interview will be audio-taped and transcribed for analytical purposes.

Participation is of course voluntary and you have the right to withdraw your son/daughter from the research project at any time should you wish to do so, without consequence. To the best of my knowledge there are no actual or potential risks - be they physical, psychological, legal, social or otherwise that might result from your son/daughter's involvement in the research.

As I need to adhere to very strict ethical considerations, your son/daughter's identity will be protected, and only my supervisor and I will be aware of his/her real name and have access to the information gathered. As researcher I am aware that you may feel pressure to give consent to participate, because I am in a position of influence being the principal of the school. Please be assured participation or non-participation will have no effect on outcomes nor on my relationship with your son/daughter.
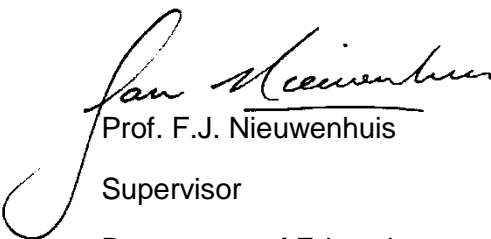
I will utilise the information solely for academic purposes. The data collected will be locked up for safety and confidentiality. As a final safeguard, the data will, at completion of my studies, be stored at the Faculty of Education of the University. Please note that research data collected with the use of public funds may be made available to other researchers. This data will be stored anonymously and will not contain any detail that will reveal your son/daughter's identity. If you give your consent for your son/daughter to take part in this research, please complete the attached consent form. Kindly contact me, or my supervisor in the event of any further queries at the contact details listed below.

Yours sincerely,

Penny Alston                                      Prof. F.J. Nieuwenhuis

Cell number: 0834519414                          Supervisor

E-mail:palston@glenashleyprep.co.za              Department of Education

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PERMISSION FOR LEARNER TO PARTICIPATE IN EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH

I, _____ parent/guardian of _____

give permission for my son/daughter to participate in this research on the understanding that
he/she may withdraw at any time.


Parent's signature:          _____

Date:                        _____

Researcher's signature:      _____

Date:                        _____

**Annexure 4 Research explanation letter to learners**



**Department: Humanities Education**

26 September 2016

Dear Learner

**RESEARCH INTO SCHOOL CHANGE**

I will be doing a research study at our school and I would like you to be part of the process.

<u>What is a research study?</u>

Research studies help us to learn new things. First, we ask a question and then we try to find the answer.

This letter is to help you better understand research and the choice that you have to take part in it.
You can ask any questions you might have, at any time.

<u>Important information you should know?</u>

- you can decide if you would like to take part in this research study
- you can say ''no" or you can say "yes"
- no one will be  upset with you if you decide to say "no"
- if you say "yes", you can say "no" later
- you can say "no" at any time
- I will take good care of you no matter what you decide to do

<u>Why are we doing research?</u>

I am doing this research to find out more about the way in which the school has changed in the last three years.

<u>What would happen if you decided to join in this research?</u>

If you decide to be part of the research, I will interview you and ask you eight questions. The interview will take place at school and will not interfere with your lesson time. The duration of the interview will be no more than twenty to thirty minutes. The interview will be audio-taped.

<u>Could bad things happen if you join in the research?</u>

Nothing bad can happen. I will interview you in the quietness of the meeting room at school where no one can hear what you are saying. If you feel uncomfortable at any stage, I will stop the interview.

<u>Could the research help you?</u>

Yes, it will help me understand how we can make our school an even better place for all learners.

<u>What else do you need to know about this research?</u>

It is OK to say "yes" and then change your mind later. You can stop being in the research at any time. If you do not want to answer any further questions, you just stop me and the interview will end.
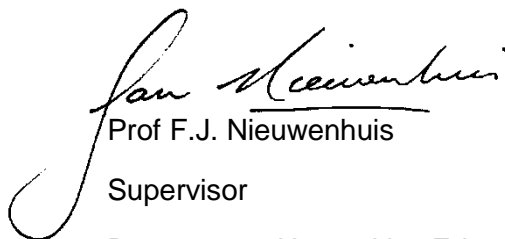
<u>Is there anything else?</u>

If you want to be part of this research project, please write your name below. I will write my name too. This shows that we have talked about the research and that you want to participate in  the interview.


Yours sincerely



Penny Alston                                          Prof F.J. Nieuwenhuis

Cell number: 0834519414                        Supervisor

E-mail:palston@glenashleyprep.co.za         Department: Humanities Education

_____

Name and surname of participant: _____

Date: _____

Name and surname of researcher: _____

Date: _____