THE EXPERIENCES OF SCHOOL LEADERS REGARDING ACTION RESEARCH AS A TOOL TO ENHANCE SCHOOL FUNCTIONING

BERNADETTE GOVENDER

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by

BERNADETTE GOVENDER

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Supervisor: Prof. LA Wood
DECLARATION

I, Bernadette Govender, student number 208090388, hereby declare that the dissertation for the degree of Magister Educationis (M.Ed) is my own work and that it has not previously been submitted for assessment or completion of any postgraduate qualification to another University or for another qualification.

BERNADETTE GOVENDER
This research study is dedicated to:

The memory of my beloved parents, Dana and Andrew Johnson

Your love and spirit remain with me always
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ABSTRACT

South African schools especially those situated in previously disadvantaged communities, are faced with a myriad of challenges that school leaders have to deal with on a daily basis. School leaders are inter alia required to improve the running and functioning of their schools. A prerequisite for good schools is strong leadership. Transformational leadership seemed an appropriate focus for this research study, in which an action research approach was followed to deal with issues that impact negatively on the functioning of schools. The aim was to explore the potential benefits of this approach in terms of improving school functioning.

A qualitative approach was adopted, as the experiences of the school leaders regarding action research as a tool to enhance the functioning of their schools were described. The aim was also to describe not only school leaders’ experiences of action research, but also to interpret these so as to make recommendations based on the findings of the qualitative investigation, as to how best action research can be used as a tool for helping school leaders address issues that impinge on school functioning. This study was informed by phenomenology, and an interpretive as well as a critical paradigm. Multiple data gathering, such as field notes, observation and interviews were employed. In line with the qualitative approach, purposive sampling was used.

The results of the research study appear to suggest that the benefits of an action research approach in improving school functioning relate to the transformation of the school climate, and that school leaders experience personal as well as professional transformation. This study recommends that action research as a model be incorporated into preparation programmes as well as professional development programmes for school leaders.
Key words

Action research
School functioning
School improvement
School leaders
Transformational leadership
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CHAPTER ONE

OVERVIEW OF INTENDED RESEARCH

1.1 INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this chapter is to introduce the focus of my research. The rationale for the study will be presented, as well as background information on the challenges that school leaders are facing that may be contributing to the current leadership crisis at South African schools. The research problem, the aims of the study, the research methodology and the ethical considerations that gave direction to this study will also be presented.

1.2 BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE FOR RESEARCH

Schools require head educators that are capable of focusing on the development and maintenance of “structures and cultures” that will guarantee continuous refinement and success, according to Tucker and Codding (2002:252). These authors state that a successful school without a successful head educator is a rare finding. In 2007, the South African Director-General of Education accentuated that submissions indicated that schools with strong leadership tended to produce more satisfactory results (Taylor & Ryan, 2005:269; Van der Westhuizen & Van Vuuren, 2007:431).

Taylor and Ryan (2005:60) have identified the most familiar shortcoming in failing schools as weak leadership, followed by poor teaching. They have identified four essential ingredients for successful schools: “leadership and vision; raising expectations; better teaching and improved discipline”. They acknowledge that it is difficult to find solutions when schools are failing, but state that headship with foresight is an important factor.
Whether schools provide first-class standards of education hinges on whether they have leaders with character who are focused on fostering prolonged benefits for educators, learners and the school (Darling-Hammond, Meyerson, LaPointe & Orr, 2010:vii). Head educators play a pivotal role in the building of flourishing schools (Darling-Hammond et al., 2010:vii). Huffman and Hipp (2003:144-145) agree with the view that strong and professional guidance by school leaders, in particular head educators, is crucial. They state explicitly that head educators who are capable of sharing power, allowing staff members to take part in decision-making and who foster a common goal, are more inclined to accomplish the desired results.

Research confirms “school leadership” as the all-important element in schools that achieve outstanding outcomes (Darling-Hammond et al., 2010:4). Researchers relate schools who deliver excellent results to school leaders who take the initiative in the reconstruction of their schools, administer the upgrading of the schools, use evaluation and assessment in order to provide support to learners who are experiencing difficulties, and reinforce teaching and learning approaches (Darling-Hammond et al., 2010:4-5).

There are no quick-fixes for schools that are unsuccessful, according to Taylor and Ryan (2005:65). They suggest that the prime concern of these schools must be “leadership and vision”. They state that a “vision” is needed in taxing or ‘difficult’ schools. This vision could be a plan or a dream that has to be developed. Troubled schools are often faced with problems that are difficult to solve. The head educator’s mission is to involve educators in order to establish a shared vision for the school (Huffman & Hipp, 2003:8). Taylor and Ryan (2005:65) assert that “making dreams a reality” should become the maxim of schools, which should be conveyed to educators, learners and parents. The focus of schools should be on achievement, and all stakeholders should be motivated to do their best, in other words, they should strive for greatness, to enable learners to become the best that they could ever be (Taylor & Ryan, 2005:65).
The above discussion clearly confirms the importance of school leadership in upholding the quality of education; behind successful schools, there are committed and competent leaders. Yet, leadership in South African schools is currently in crisis – perhaps not surprising, given the historical and political background from which it is emerging.

**Historical background**

Perumal (2009:35) states that schooling for Black South Africans was traditionally associated with the legislative or governmental, financial and societal rule introduced via various laws such as the Bantu Education Act of 1953, the Indian Education Act of 1965 and the Coloured Persons Act of 1963.

In the 1950’s, schooling in South Africa was controlled by the then “Apartheid” government. The apartheid government held that Whites were superior to Blacks, and this philosophy filtered through to the education system (Perumal, 2009:36). Smith and Foster (2002:2) also highlight the fact that during the Apartheid era, schooling in South Africa operated according to a “racial hierarchy”; with education for Whites far better resourced and funded than the education provided for Blacks. This view is augmented by Weber (2002:619) and Botha (2004:239), who posit that South African education during the Apartheid era was fragmented, divided and unjust. It was not unusual for the government to spend eight or nine times more on White than on Black schools (Weber, 2002:619). State rule was consistently to the advantage of Whites; this related to syllabi, teaching strategies, tests and the administration thereof, the recruitment and remuneration of educators, the payment of current expenses and the building and financing of schools (Weber, 2002:619). Particularly under the regime of erstwhile Prime Minister Hendrik Verwoerd, the express aim of education for Blacks was to keep them from progressing above a certain socio-economic level: “There is no place for the African in the European community above the level of certain forms of labour” (Perumal, 2009:36).
South Africa is renowned for immense inequalities in income distribution. The vast disparities in income between the various racial groups are by-products of the Apartheid era. Poverty was the norm among Africans, who were largely restricted to rural areas. The “homelands” allocated to the various African ethnic groupings were designed to accommodate separate development, but in effect increased social deprivation. These areas provided few employment opportunities, and the men consequently had to migrate to cities and urban areas in search of employment, fragmenting and eroding common life. Moreover, in these “homelands”, Africans were practically deprived of owning any assets – most of them possessed nothing besides chickens (Fiske & Ladd, 2005:53).

Black schools received very little resources and the educators were few and poorly qualified. The classrooms, laboratories and libraries were substandard or non-existent. A *sine qua non* for good schooling, namely qualified educators and adequate school equipment were glaringly absent in Black schools (Fiske & Ladd, 2005:5). The teaching practices followed and the “management styles” of the school leaders were autocratic; curricula were biased and openly “racist and sexist”; rote learning was the preferred approach; little thinking took place; and anachronistic methods of assessment and evaluation were the order of the day (Perumal, 2009:36). Syllabi were designed with White learners in mind, completely disregarding the needs of Coloured, Indian and Black learners. The objective of education was to cement the inferior standing of Black learners. It is therefore no surprise that subjects relating to careers or professions, namely commercial and technical subjects, were not offered at Black schools (Fiske & Ladd, 2005:45).

Most Black schools were poorly resourced, with school buildings in a poor state of repair and classes hugely overcrowded. It was common to have classes of 50 or more learners in Black schools, while classes were much smaller in White, Indian and Coloured schools. Black schools had not only a dearth of classrooms, but many had no electricity, water and toilets (Fiske & Ladd, 2005:55). Ngcobo and Tikly (2010:209) affirm that township and rural schools were short of recreational and “sporting facilities”
and that hygiene were virtually non-existent, as sanitation facilities were inadequate or non-existent. They state that desks and equipment such as photocopiers were often defective, sometimes through deliberate damage.

Educators at black secondary schools generally possessed inferior qualifications to their white counterparts. For instance, the qualifications of educators in 1976 ranged from 1.7% (university degree), 10.4% Grade 12 (certificate); 49.3% (two years of high schooling); and 21% (primary school education only) (November, Alexander & Van Wyk, 2010:787). Fiske and Ladd (2005:55) state that in 1995, an educator audit revealed that about 25% of educators at Black schools were inadequately qualified. They state that this figure was not a true reflection of the expanse of the problem if one takes into account that these educators were exposed to substandard training at the teachers’ colleges of the time, located in the so-called “homelands” (Fiske & Ladd, 2005:55). November et al. (2010:787) state that teachers of different races were trained at different training colleges, technikons and universities. Admission was based exclusively on race. Teaching strategies and the approaches taught to educators were different; again, Apartheid served as an impediment, and people's reasoning, their knowledge, skills, convictions and fundamental principles were restricted to a specific model (November et al., 2010:787).

Black schools were generally subjected to weak leadership and management, since the only prerequisite for headship was seven years’ teaching experience. Consequently, many principal-educators in rural schools were unskilled and incapable of operating and leading their schools successfully (Fiske & Ladd, 2005:55-56). I do acknowledge that during the Apartheid years, there were many Black educators who were remarkably effective educators by virtue of their dedication, commitment, and conviction that a quality education was the prerogative of every child. In spite of, and under appalling oppression, these educators delivered high quality education (Moletsane, 2011).

According to November et al. (2010:787), the many difficulties experienced in township schools stemmed from the abuse of power wielded by the Apartheid government in
education, which resulted in weak leadership and the complete failure of education in these schools (November et al., 2010:787). The generally low standard of education, which was characteristic of Black schools, gave rise to the Soweto uprisings in 1976, when masses of school-going youth took to the streets in protest against the hated Apartheid education (Perumal, 2009:36). These uprisings, although occupying a significant and symbolic place in the freedom struggle, did little to improve the inferior education offered in the townships (Smith & Foster, 2002:2). The absence of an ethos of teaching and learning can be attributed to Apartheid. Black communities identified, resisted and rejected the suppressive and inferior “Bantu education” meted out to them (Fiske & Ladd, 2005:59). It was extremely difficult to generate active parental involvement in schools, because of deeply entrenched perceptions of schools as tools of “political subjugation” and the often illiterate parents’ lack of knowledge of the school system and academic issues. Attitudes towards schooling were therefore extremely negative, and emancipation or freedom was advocated as being of greater urgency than education (Fiske & Ladd, 2005:59). Communities had no faith in the government and the education systems, and schools became increasingly isolated from the majority of society (Smith & Foster, 2002:2).

According to Smith and Foster (2002:3), the renewal of education was a cornerstone of the transformation introduced by South Africa’s first democratic government in 1994. The re-establishment of a “culture of teaching and learning” alluded to the lack of conditions conducive to teaching and learning in township schools and the general negativity and/or apathy towards schooling. Reinstating a culture of teaching and learning also implies that discipline and an awareness of the importance of education must be instilled in both learners and educators (Smith & Foster, 2002:3). The previous South African Minister of Education, Naledi Pandor, remarked that the cliché: “Liberation now, education later!”, a popular slogan during Apartheid, had impacted negatively on education, especially during the 1980s. She stated that, regrettably, that attitude was still widespread in many township schools.
According to some media reports, in 2005, a large numbers of learners in township schools were absent from schools because their educators took part in a public sector strike in February 2005 (Niemann & Kotze, 2006:609). South African educators were and are still faced with the challenge that learners did not realise the significance of scholastic accomplishment and see no financial rewards or gains in it. Educators who are fighting to change such opinions are not supported by parents or guardians, who are grappling with the multitude of challenges related to poverty (Fiske & Ladd, 2005:58).

The adverse ramifications of Apartheid prevailed not only in schools, but in all facets of civilisation in South Africa. Apartheid was so deeply entrenched and detrimental, especially for Blacks, that it will take many years, if not an eternity, to rectify its wrongs (Fiske & Ladd, 2005:52). “Bantu education” was underresourced, certain jobs were reserved for Whites only, and Black people were prevented from securing certain skills. The legacy of apartheid has made it difficult to meet the demands of “globalisation in the twenty-first century” (Fiske & Ladd, 2005:52).

These challenges prompted the post-apartheid government to introduce formal structures aimed at restoring a “culture of teaching and learning” in the 1990s in an attempt to transform the education system, based on values that underpin the South African Constitution Act No. 108 of 1996 (Fiske & Ladd, 2005:59).

**Education in post-apartheid South Africa**

In 1994, apartheid was abolished and replaced by democracy, underpinned by the South African Constitution (Asmal & James, 2002:174-175). Up to the present time, the legacy of apartheid remains visible in the majority of citizens, who are illiterate and, in many instances, also ill-informed (Asmal & James, 2002:175). The state found itself in a Catch 22 situation in its attempts to implement the democratic principles of equal access to education and a discrimination and prejudice-free society. As the state was striving for an equal redistribution of resources, inequities snowballed (Asmal & James,
Lemmer (2000:18) raises a similar point, stating that the disparities of Apartheid have led to a backlog in human and fiscal capital. She asserts that the democratic government’s attempts to address these inconsistencies have not succeeded in changing the climate of non-teaching and non-learning in South African schools. The moral foundations of a community in turmoil have remained unchanged (Lemmer, 2000:18). Another major challenge that has confronted the state is to establish and sustain quality schools constructed on the democratic morals and values inbedded in society. Regrettably, many South African communities are still deprived of democratic values and traditions (Asmal & James, 2002:175).

According to Sayed and Jansen (2001:36), the Ministry of Education undertook a survey of conditions in township schools. The results indicated that it would be a formidable task to turn around the climate of poor discipline and laxity that had characterised those schools for so long. In these dysfunctional schools, educators, parents and learners have different views and perceptions. Some educators disregard their own profession. Fleisch (2002:101) states that the so-called previously disadvantaged schools were characterised by chaos and instability and were alluded to as “laissez-faire schools”, in which unrestricted freedom reigned. At many of these schools, learners would arrive late and leave school after the early morning break. Educators would fail to turn up at their classes to teach (Fleisch, 2002:101). Parents seemed not to realise that the schooling of their children was also their responsibility. A significant portion of the parent community demonstrated a lack of concern about the welfare of their children, as well as total apathy towards their children’s schooling and school affairs. Many learners indulged in a life of crime, gangsterism and premature sex (Sayed & Jansen, 2001:36). These children were destined for lives characterized by scant opportunities. These deficiencies pose challenges to the state to develop democratic practices in a society of which a significant percentage are unschooled (Sayed & Jansen, 2001:37).

Another reason for the persisting inequalities in education is the matter of school fees. The South African Schools Act 84 of 1996 (Section 39(1)) stipulates that a state school may decide on the amount of school fees to be levied if a pledge has been made by the
majority of parents at a meeting convened specifically for this purpose (Education Labour Relations Council, 2003:B-18). According to the National Norms and Standard for School Funding, No. 46 (Education Labour Relations Council, 2003:B-45), the South African Schools Act seem to have benefitted state schools that are financed by middle-income and affluent parents. These schools are in a position to employ additional educators on contract, remunerated by the school governing body. According to the aforementioned document (No. 47), many rural and poor urban schools have to contend with huge classes, dilapidated buildings, a shortage of learning and teaching materials and inferior or non-existent facilities, despite the fact that numerous schemes, financed from provincial budgets, have been implemented. Educators and learners in impoverished schools are required to deliver education equal to their colleagues in wealthier schools (Education Labour Relations Council, 2003:B-46).

Children in historically disadvantaged schools are deprived of opportunities and support and are confronted with enormous stumbling blocks. For them, there is no academic ladder edging them on toward greater self-esteem and success (Bloch, 2006:3). This underlines the fact that schooling has gone disastrously wrong for some 80% of South African learners (Bloch, 2006:4). Bloch refers to the majority of township and rural schools as “sinkholes” where learners are “warehoused” instead of schooled. Learners are caught in a poverty and unemployment trap, instead of being elevated to independence, self-determination, options and chances (Bloch, 2006:4). Education is a factor in the inequity and the marginalisation experienced by the poor and rural, rather than in fostering solidarity and inspiration (Bloch, 2006:4).

**Contemporary issues in school leadership**

The historical background described above offers some insight into how difficult the leadership task can be in historically disadvantaged South African schools. Literature indicates that many problems face leadership in South African schools (Bloch, 2006; Bush, 2008; Chisholm, 2004). Yet, one of the main problems facing school leaders is that they have received little or no training for their roles. A full discussion of the
challenges facing school leadership in South Africa will be given in Chapter Two, but two main factors will be briefly explained below.

- **Lack of suitably qualified candidates for school leadership positions**

The current trend is that the number of applicants for leadership positions is diminishing. Mestry and Grobler (2003:127) state that as head educators resign, their positions are being filled by educators who lack experience in the education field and leadership certification (Mestry & Grobler, 2003:127).

There appears to be some reluctance among the educators currently in leadership positions to take up their role as school leaders. School leaders experience the professional demands made on them as overwhelming, according to Harris (2007:106). They experience school management problems, due to limited management skills. According to Masitsa (2005:178), management skills that are lacking in some school leaders, include legal and financial acumen.

- **Need for training of school leaders**

According to Bush (2008:89), school leaders are usually appointed to the headship without any conventional preparation. The leadership abilities of school leaders are not evaluated and they are appointed purely on the basis of their teaching experience. Books (2008:70) posits that principal-educators seldom receive any form of training in terms of the advancement of their competencies.

Books (2008:70), asserts that no documentation or certification requirements currently exist for headship in South Africa. Prior to 1994, educators in South Africa were schooled in terms of the Apartheid laws that were practised. This implies that, currently, Black and Coloured principal-educators not only have had no preparation for their positions as school leaders, but may also have been deprived of a sound secondary education (Books, 2008:70). Van der Westhuizen and Van Vuuren (2007:434)
emphasise that principal-educators can no longer be appointed solely on the premise of their academic and professional qualifications. They state that there is an increasing need for the establishment of a conventional professional qualification specifically designed for headship.

According to Moloi (2007:471), the Department of Education affirms that teaching and managing are very different tasks and require divergent skills. It is essential that a vocational, professional development programme and qualification be pioneered (Moloi, 2007:471).

South Africa is in the midst of launching a certification for principal-educators, the Advanced Certificate in Education (ACE): School Leadership, with the intention of making it compulsory by 2010 (Bush, 2008:59). The Advanced Certificate in Education (ACE): School Leadership, was established by the Department of Education as an entrance certificate for headship (Moloi, 2007:471). However, this certificate will apply only to new principals and not to those already in the system.

1.3 PROBLEM STATEMENT

Leaders of previously disadvantaged schools face many problems in leading and improving their schools. Most schools are poorly resourced and fraught with social problems. The Department of Education is not in the position to provide the support needed. Most school leaders have not received any training in leading or improving their schools; therefore, unless they learn how to address and improve conditions, schools and education at schools will not be likely to improve. There is therefore a need to explore ways in which school leaders can be helped to take initiative and action to improve the functioning of their schools.
1.4 PURPOSE OF RESEARCH

Based on the above problem statement, the purpose of this research was to explore how school leaders could be assisted in addressing issues that impacted negatively on the functioning of their schools, by adopting an action research approach. This study aimed to describe and explain the Action Research (AR) process as experienced by school leaders in order to ascertain its usefulness as a tool to help school leadership tackle problematic issues at their schools.

1.5 OBJECTIVES OF RESEARCH

Derived from the purpose, the objectives of this research were:

- to describe and explain the process of Action Research (AR), as implemented by the school leaders involved;
- to explore and describe the experiences of school leaders as they implement this process;
- to explore the usefulness of this approach to help school leaders take action to address issues that impact negatively on school functioning;
- based on the findings of the qualitative investigation, to make recommendations as to how best action research (AR) can be used as a tool for helping school leaders address issues that impinge on school functioning.

1.5.1 Formulation of research questions
On the basis of the above rationale and the problem statement, the following research questions were formulated:

**Main research question:**

*What are the potential benefits of an action research approach to improving school functioning?*

**Secondary questions:**

*What are the experiences of school leaders as they implement an action research project to address an issue that is negatively impacting on school functioning?*

*What are the challenges facing school leaders in the implementation of an action research approach to address problematic issues in their school?*

*What recommendations can be made with regard to the use of action research as a tool for assisting school leaders in addressing issues that impact negatively on school functioning?*

### 1.6 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK GUIDING STUDY

Action research is grounded in specific principles, which will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter Four of this dissertation. The style of leadership adopted by school leaders needs to be congruent with these principals, and for that reason, the theoretical approach to leadership that will guide the analysis of the findings of this study is transformational leadership. Transformational leadership can be defined as leadership that can come up with a vision that is compelling and unambiguous, generating commitment from followers, through participation, to identify with this vision and the initiation of change in the organisation (Kirkbride, 2006:23). Transformational leaders are viewed as encouraging and ingenious, with a profound concern for people and the
ability and artistry to communicate with their followers (Grout & Fisher, 2007:201). It is based on collaboration, morals and values (Grout & Fisher, 2007:201). Transformational leadership will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Two.

1.7 CLARIFICATION OF CONCEPTS USED

1.7.1 Action research

Action research is an experiential or hands-on process that can be used to generate change (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007:234). In participatory action research, the individuals involved with the research project work collectively on a project that is of concern to them with the purpose of establishing suggestions (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007:235). Bogdan and Biklen (2007:240) assert that action research is a technique that can be implemented to allow individuals to participate actively in matters of importance.

McGarvey (2007:2) describes participatory action research as a partnership between all stakeholders, including those in a position of authority, because participatory action research (PAR) is described as “bottom up” and “inside out” research. In action research, university researchers and educators collaborate on projects to produce “continuous feedback loops” to advance education and learner results (McGarvey, 2007:2).

According to Riel (2010:1), action researchers search for corroboration from various sources to assist them in examining responses to the efforts or actions taken. They try to develop insight into events from diverse angles, because they acknowledge that their own viewpoints may be personal and not objective (Riel, 2010:1).

In this study, the school leaders implemented an action research design to address issues in their schools that negatively impacted on school functioning. This study attempted to explore and describe their experiences of this process.
1.7.2 **School leadership**

Leadership is an indistinct concept, which is often misconstrued and difficult to explain (Cragg & Spurgeon, 2007:109).

Evers and Katyal (2007:378) describe leadership as effective school leaders who establish effective schools in which educators and learners are encouraged and assisted to achieve.

Leadership is often viewed as an element of “management”, with authentic leaders distinguished as individuals with charisma and direction, capable of inspiring more individuals in the organisation (Coleman & Earley, 2005:7).

Leadership is described as the capacity to lead, organise, coordinate or regulate and to have an impact on subordinates, with the aim of reaching the objectives of the organisation. Leaders are usually capable of persuading their subordinates to accomplish their objectives (Ojo & Olaniyan, 2008:172).

Clarke (2007:1) states that while the concepts leadership and management are often used interchangeably, they have very different meanings. The tasks and functions associated with leadership vary according to the roles associated with management. Leadership entails giving guidance and having aspirations. Management involves productiveness and proficiency. Management entails putting structures in place that will ensure that the school is functioning well (Clarke, 2007:3). Leaders focus on the future, while managers focus on the present (Clarke, 2007:1). Schools require school leaders with strong leadership and good management skills (Clarke, 2007:1).

According to Loock (2003:2), leadership is seen as affecting people in such a manner that they will readily endeavour to realise the aims of the group.

Currently all stakeholders in schools are entitled to “leadership and management”; school leadership is no longer associated with head educators exclusively. The idea of
the “single, heroic leader” does not apply any more (Van der Mescht & Tyala, 2008:221). Huffman and Hipp (2003:145) refer to head educators as “leaders of leaders”, because they concentrate on developing the leadership abilities in others by building teams, sharing decision-making and aspiring to develop leaders in the organisation.

In this study, school leadership is defined as developing leadership capabilities and leaders in order to influence staff and learners to work collaboratively towards achieving the goals of the organisation. The aim is also to ensure that the organisation is rich with and not deficient of leaders.

1.7.3 School functioning

The McKeown (2008) *Collins Concise English Dictionary* describes a school as an organisation in which children and young individuals receive instruction. The staff members and learners of a school also comprise a school, according to the *Collins Concise English Dictionary*.

Functioning implies to “perform or carry out” a person’s work or function. Functioning is described in the *Collins Concise English Dictionary* as to “operate or perform as specified” or to do one’s work properly.

Learners at schools that are operating well will perform well, too. These schools will be attractive to learners who are academically strong and who in turn will bring honour to the performance and functioning of the schools (Kanje & Prinsloo, 2005:13). Increasing demands are made on school leaders to operate their schools properly. Schools need to increase their performance in terms of their fundamental functions of teaching and learning (Kanje & Prinsloo, 2005:1). In this study, school functioning relates to a positive school climate in which conditions and opportunities are created for teaching and learning. School management teams are required to ensure that their schools operate orderly and function optimally (Kanje & Prinsloo, 2005:27).
1.8 RESEARCH DESIGN

Maree (2007:70) defines a research design as a formula or procedure based on the researcher’s notional beliefs, which describes the choice of participants, the approaches to be employed to gather information, as well as how the data will be anatomised. De Vos, Strydom, Fouché and Delport (2005:268) view the word “design” as associated with “strategies, methods, approaches and traditions of inquiry”. De Vos et al. (2005:268) use the word “paradigms” instead of design when alluding to the investigator’s choice of techniques to be employed to investigate a specific situation. De Vos et al. (2005:268) interpret “design” as the complete investigation approach. A brief overview of the design and methodology employed in this study is presented below, to be discussed in greater depth in Chapter Three.

1.8.1 Paradigm informing research

Groenewald (2004:6) describes a paradigm as a plan, system or point of reference of the researcher's thoughts; it is the researcher's ideology or philosophy that provides direction to the investigation (Groenewald, 2004:7).

This study was influenced by the interpretive paradigm. Proponents of the interpretive paradigm contend that making meaning is a collective process. Individuals with the same cultures and traditions may establish meaning and are enabled to share their interpretations with the other individuals of the group (Willis, 2007:97). Interpretivists believe that it is essential to understand the context or situation in order to make an interpretation of the data collected (Willis, 2007:98). The interpretive paradigm acknowledges that personal meanings play a pivotal role in social behavior and strive to disseminate explanations and meanings (Walliman, 2006:15).

The purpose of interpretive research is not to uncover general or universal laws and rules, but to understand a certain condition or situation (Willis, 2007:99). Interpretivists are concerned about interpreting data by considering the circumstances. Willis
(2007:99) refers to this as the “situatedness of knowledge”. The knowledge or information that is established, relates to the situation or context, not to laws or rules (Willis, 2007:99). Interpretive research results in a better understanding of a particular situation, not in making generalisations according to rules (Willis, 2007:190).

Willis (2007:190) was concerned with offering a frame of reference to assist the reader in understanding the specific phenomenon being researched (Willis, 2007:190). The interpretive paradigm highlights the need for multiple viewpoints (Willis, 2007:192). Interpretists hold the view that individuals act on their own motivation and that it is best to examine a certain situation in a certain context. Communication, interaction and sharing of interpretations are vital to establish reality. Interpretivism is an “inside-out” approach; reality is enterprising and receptive to the variation of interaction and perceptions of individuals (Willis, 2007:193). When studying the social sciences, two styles can be utilised, namely the emic style and the etic style. The emic style views matters through the lens of the individuals under study (Willis, 2007:100).

An inherent element of the interpretive paradigm, is critical theory (Basit, 2010:15) which is also linked to the origin of action research (McNiff & Whitehead, 2006:41). Action Research, according to McNiff and Whitehead (2006:41) went beyond critical theory, to not only understand a situation, but to take action by changing it. McNiff and Whitehead (2006:41), point out that critical theory came forth as research is frequently used by research investigators for a particular purpose. People create their own social situations, therefore these situations can thus be deconstructed and recreated by them. In order to change a situation, understanding of it is pivotal (McNiff & Whitehead, 2006:41). A research investigator working within a critical paradigm, would insist that such research strive for transformation of people and communities (Clough & Nutbrown, 2002:15).

1.8.2 Qualitative research approach
I selected a qualitative research approach for the purpose of my study. In qualitative research, the researcher interacts with the participants and observes them in their own “natural” setting. In doing so, human behaviour is studied to emphasise the significance of the subjects (Maree, 2007:51). Qualitative researchers aim at obtaining an “insider’s perspective”, in other words, they try to comprehend events in the way in which they are experienced by the respondents (Ary, Jacobs, Razavieh & Sorensen, 2006:449). Qualitative research zooms in on comprehending and giving a portrayal of events as they occur in a particular setting, with the aim of comprehending the meaning of such events, in other words, to “see through the eyes of the participants”. The researcher’s purpose was to give an account of the subjects’ meaning (Maree, 2007:51). Qualitative researchers believe in illuminating individual practices in order to devise an interpretation of the study (Ary et al., 2006:450).

In this study, a phenomenological approach was employed. Ary et al. (2006:461) declare that phenomenology originated to illustrate and make sense of an experience by ascertaining the meaning of the experience, as regarded by the participants. Ary et al. (2006:461) assert that phenomenology is entrenched in philosophy and psychology. The presumption is that there are numerous ways of explicating the very same experience and that different people will attach different meanings to an experience. The phenomenological approach suited the objective of this study, as it aimed to explore the experiences of school leaders and give an extensive account of these experiences and meanings (Groenewald, 2004:5; Struwig & Stead, 2001:12).

1.8.3 Research methodology

De Vos et al. (2005:71) refer to the research methodology as the investigation procedure or the modus operandi utilised by a researcher. Creswell (2003:5) states that research methodology also covers the master plan to be utilised by the researcher in connecting the methods used to anticipated outcomes. Research methodology deals with the sampling, data collection and data analysis techniques deployed in a research study (Creswell, 2003:5).
• **Sampling**

In qualitative research, sampling necessitates choosing a certain segment of the population to be investigated. “Non-probability and purposive sampling” are used as a basis in qualitative inquiry. Purposive sampling implies that particular criteria are used in the choice of respondents who would be able to provide the data required for the investigation (Maree, 2007:79). In this study, nine schools, which could be classified as historically disadvantaged (see paragraph 1.2) were purposively selected to participate. The principal of each school was invited to take part and select at least one other person from the management team to participate. If a school principal declined to participate, he/she was asked to nominate either the deputy principal or another senior member of management. The twenty-seven participants therefore included principal-educators, deputy principals and heads of departments from primary and secondary schools. Full details of the participants will be given in Chapter Three.

• **Data collection**

In qualitative inquiry, numerous data collection methods may be employed by the researcher, such as observation, field notes and interviews. In this study, the following methods were deployed: observation, field notes, interviews and document analysis (Creswell, 2009:179-180). The brief discussion that follows, will be supplemented in detail in Chapter Three.

Maree (2007:84) describes **observation** as a technique used in qualitative research to keep account of the actions and responses of individuals under study through careful monitoring. Observation entitles the investigator to experience the events from the point of view of the subjects and make sense of their world. Data is gathered by means of the actual monitoring or watching of the participants under investigation and recording what has been observed in the process (De Vos *et al.*, 2005:281).
In this study, I observed thirteen sessions during which the participants presented their action research project to each other and to the project leaders. I took careful notes of the important points that emerged from the ensuing discussions, highlighting the problems, successes and learning that emerged. This data will be presented in detail in Chapter Four.

**Interviews** are used in qualitative research as the main tool to collect data. The purpose is to provide a description of the participants’ own views to enable the researcher to gain an understanding of the participants’ experiences. The researcher is actually trying to place himself/herself in the position of the participant (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007:103). Bogdan and Biklen (2007:103) define an interview as a dialogue that involves two or more individuals and is controlled by one person, with the aim of acquiring particulars from the other individuals. By using interviews, the investigator will be able to understand the opinions of the participants “through the stories” that they give during the interviews (Struwig & Stead, 2001:56). Interviews can provide useful particulars to researchers if they are utilised in the correct manner (Maree, 2007:87).

I also made use of **structured interviews**, of which the main purpose was to explore the experiences of the school leaders in using action research to address specific problems in their schools (Struwig & Stead, 2001:99). The interview schedule is presented in Appendix C.

In **document or content analysis**, the emphasis is on the analysis and interpretation of recorded information within its own setting (Ary *et al.*, 2006:32). When employing these documents, researchers have to authenticate the source as well as validate the text or material (Ary *et al.*, 2006:32).

Different types of documents may, according to Cresswell (2009:180), be employed by researchers. A distinction is made by Cresswell (2009:180) between public documents, such as minutes of meetings or newspapers, and private documents, such as journals, diaries or letters. Ary *et al.* (2006:32) include reports, tapes and themes. I consulted the
minutes of meetings, the journals kept by the school leaders and even letters written during the data collection process, as well as the project reports written by the school leaders.

- **Data analysis**

In qualitative research, the process of collecting data cannot be separated from the process of analysing the data (De Vos et al., 2005:335). The qualitative inquirer can perfect the data along the process until a range of data has been collected. This implies that the human inquirer is able to adapt the data on a regular basis. In analysing data, it becomes necessary to revise the processes and methods of collecting data. New data will be generated in this process of making modifications, which will necessitate another analysis, resulting in the gathering of “rich data” (De Vos et al., 2005:335).

Data collection and data analysis go together in order to obtain a reasoned explanation of the data that has been gathered. The human inquirer will adapt or modify the data as the inquirer gathers and scrutinises the data (De Vos et al., 2005:335).

Creswell (2009:186) defines coding as the exercise or undertaking of arranging the information into sections. The coding process entails sorting the data collected for analysis by transcribing interviews and typing field notes. The researcher undertakes a fine-grained analysis of what was said and what was recorded in order to develop “categories of information” (Creswell, 2009:184). All the information that relates to one theme will be grouped into one category. The information within the groups must be contrasted to look for subtle differences and variations in meanings. The aim is to merge the themes into a proposition that will render an explication of the study (Mouton, 2001).
1.8.4 Literature control

A literature study is carried out, to establish a solid theoretical framework for the research, to endorse the positioning and the justification for the research investigation, to give reasons for the research design and methodology, and to juxtapose and substantiate the research findings of the investigation to past investigations relating to the study (Creswell, 2005:79-80). The investigator seeks pertinent and practical information concerning the study in order to obtain the wisdom and thoughts, views and opinions of different investigations. This study made use of references such as documents and records because of their availability, cost-effectiveness, relevance and the fact that they could enrich this investigation (Leedy & Ormrod, 2001:154; Lincoln & Guba, 1985:276).

1.8.5 Measures to ensure trustworthiness

Lincoln and Guba's model was utilised in this study to make certain that the research findings are trustworthy and authentic (Creswell, 2005:252; Lincoln & Guba, 1985:219). Trustworthiness is closely associated with the following benchmarks: plausibility (to confirm the truthfulness or accuracy of the research findings); transferability (to verify the relevance of the findings); dependability or reliability (to make sure that the findings are consistent); and validity (to confirm the principle of impartiality or neutrality). The following methods were utilised in this study to ensure trustworthiness (Leedy & Ormrod, 2001:106; Lincoln & Guba, 1985:219):

- In-depth Interviews.
- An audit trail.
- Conducting the investigation in the natural setting of the subjects.
- A variety of data collection methods.
- A literature control.
- Independent coding and re-coding.
A “thick” description, to provide a portrayal of the situation to enable readers to arrive at their own conclusions.

- A comprehensive description of the research methodology.
- Presentation of raw material to ensure plausibility.

### 1.9 ETHICAL MEASURES

Struwig and Stead (2001:66) assert that ethics in research serve as a “code of moral guidelines” that investigators can use to give direction to their investigation.

The Harber and Payton (1979:368) *Heinemann English Dictionary* defines “ethics” as “a system of rules or principles for behavior within a group or society according to which actions are judged”.

Ethical matters of concern to me in this study related to respecting the participants’ privacy by not revealing their personal identities or the information given, encouraging participants to volunteer to participate. A letter requesting permission to participate in the study was submitted to each school principal, and ethics clearance was also obtained from the University’s Ethics Board (Maree, 2007:42). This clearance is not granted unless the Board is satisfied that all ethical requirements have been met.

Other ethical values relevant to my study included integrity, in terms of which the investigator must at all times respect all the participants and be honest and open to them and conduct the investigation in a dignified manner (Struwig & Stead, 2001:67).
1.10 DIVISION OF CHAPTERS

My study will unfold as follows:

CHAPTER ONE: OVERVIEW OF INTENDED RESEARCH

In this chapter, a basic explanation of the focus of my research is provided. This chapter delineates the research problem, the reasons for the research and the research methodology utilised.

CHAPTER TWO: OVERVIEW OF LITERATURE RELATED TO THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK OF STUDY

The aim of this chapter is to review current literature regarding school leadership and discuss an appropriate theoretical approach to leadership, with specific reference to South Africa.

CHAPTER THREE: THEORETICAL DISCUSSION OF SELECTED RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

This chapter will explain in detail the research design and methodology, grounding it in literature to offer a justification for the adoption of a specific design.

CHAPTER FOUR: THEORETICAL EXPLICATION OF ACTION RESEARCH PROCESS

This chapter will review current literature on the use of action research to improve the quality of education and educational delivery.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS OF RESEARCH STUDY
The chapter will examine the implications of the research findings for the use of action research as a method of assisting school leaders in addressing specific problems in their schools.

CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF STUDY

This chapter will present the conclusions that can be drawn from the findings, as well as the recommendations and limitations of the research.

1.11 CONCLUSION

Chapter One presented the reasons for the study, background information, the problem statement and the research questions. The research design was outlined, as well as matters relating to ethics and trustworthiness. In the following chapter, a literature review of the current issues facing school leadership in South Africa will be presented. The theoretical framework of transformational leadership will be related to the leadership requirements for implementing action research.
CHAPTER TWO

OVERVIEW OF LITERATURE RELATED TO THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK OF STUDY

2.1 INTRODUCTION

In Chapter Two, the intention is to provide an in-depth review of the literature regarding school leadership in South Africa, particularly the challenges leaders face because of the changing contexts in which they work. The theory chosen to provide a framework to the study, namely, transformational leadership, will also be discussed with reference to the literature.

2.2 CHALLENGES FACED BY SCHOOL LEADERSHIP

School leaders in South Africa are confronted with a massive task, according to Steyn (2008:890), as they seek to establish effective learning and teaching environments. November et al. (2010:787) assert that innovative leadership skills and a different line of thinking are required to meet the challenges of decentralisation in an educational environment that has grown increasingly complex (Mestry & Grobler, 2002:22). Some of the major challenges facing school leaders are discussed below.

2.2.1 Need for a more democratic style of leadership

November et al. (2010:786) state that, during Apartheid, head educators were bureaucrats whose independence was restricted. They were seen as public servants and had to comply with the policies of government. Principal-educators had to contend with hierarchies that exercised control internally as well as externally. As civil servants, they were expected to carry out instructions (November et al., 2010:787). However, in terms of the South African Schools Act (84 of 1996), principal-educators now have a
different role to play and are compelled to adopt to a more democratic management style (Mestry & Singh, 2007:482).

According to Botha (2006:341), educational policies and legislation, such as the South African Schools Act 84 of 1996, demand that all role-players in education participate fully and work together in democratic ways. Decentralising the decision-making process and applying democratic principles in the governance and management of schools are at the core of the new legislation and policy initiatives (Botha, 2006:341). There has been a major shift or change in roles in schools, with principal-educators now expected to be the main role-players in the transformation process.

The South African Schools Act 84 of 1996, Section 16(1) stipulates that the “governance” of state schools is granted to the school governing body, that has the legal rights and is accountable for carrying out the tasks specified in this Act (Education Labour Relations Council, 2003: B-11) (ELRC). The South African Schools Act (84 of 1996), Section 16(3) also stipulates that school leaders, namely principal-educators, are responsible for the “professional management” of a state school and are authorised by the “Head of Department” (Education Labour Relations Council, 2003). The same Act, in Section 19(2), specifies that principal-educators and other departmental officials are obliged to provide support to school governing bodies in the execution of their duties (Education Labour Relations Council, 2003:B-12).

It is clear that principal-educators’ roles have been redefined and that they are now called upon to practise leadership that fosters involvement and participation by all stakeholders (Botha, 2006:342). According to Van der Mescht and Tyala (2008:221), the South African education system has progressed towards “site-based management”, mainly to include management approaches that underscore participation. School leaders, in particular, principal-educators, are no longer regarded as being solely responsible for leading and managing their schools. All stakeholders in education are now entitled to – and expected to – participate in leadership and management. Bottom-up structures are preferred to “hierarchical top-down structures” (Van der Mescht &
Tyala, 2008:221). The adaptation of leadership approaches emphasises “group or team leadership” instead of focusing on the individual leader, such as the principal-educator (Van der Mescht & Tyala, 2008:222).

In order to implement educational transformation, “school-based management” has become the vehicle to surrender decision-making powers to the level of schools (Swanepoel, 2008:40). Botha (2004:239) declares that the Education Department is continually discharging changes in order to keep abreast with trends globally. According to Botha (2004:239), the restructuring of schools can be achieved only through the decentralisation of power, where decision-making is shared and all stakeholders are influenced to change and to get to grips with the educational difficulties. Botha (2004:239) indicates that “school-based management” requires a “new professionalism” from school leaders, because of the new challenges that they have to tackle to ensure that they function effectively in the ever-changing school environment.

The key challenge is to revise the functions of leadership in order to effect change that will foster democracy in schools. Botha (2004:240) asserts that democratic schools must be established through enabling participation by all stakeholders in decision-making; however, he cautions that a prerequisite for success is the acquisition of the necessary knowledge and skills. The role of the principal-educator is currently that of a “facilitative leader”; he or she connects all stakeholders, namely educators, learners, parents and the community, in adjusting to changes and working hand in hand to find solutions to problems and to enhance the performance of learners and educators (Botha, 2004:240). Swanepoel (2008:41) states that school leaders, especially principal-educators, are struggling to adjust to their new role of shared decision-making. This devolved decision-making responsibility also has implications for the financial running of schools.
2.2.2 Increasing need for financial acumen

Moloi (2007:468) asserts that financial management has become one of the pivotal functions of school leaders since the enactment of the South African Schools Act (1996). School leaders and school governing bodies have broad financial duties, which include budgeting, administration of funds, determining school fees and increasing resources. Moloi (2007:469) has established that canvassed school leaders in Gauteng felt anxious about performing financial management functions, emphasising the importance of further training in this regard.

According to Griesel (2001:2), Section 36 of the South African Schools Act (1996:24) stipulates that school governing bodies have to raise supplementary funds for their schools. For a school to function effectively in the provision of teaching and learning, it will have to take charge of its resources and augment the supplies provided by the State, from its own funds. This necessitates that schools’ revenue be planned and administered in a way that will ensure the optimal utilisation of limited resources. School leaders in previously disadvantaged communities often have difficulty in this regard, because many of them have never received relevant training. In the past, financial management skills were not a priority requirement, because the Department of Education provided the necessary items and funds to schools. School leaders are now at a disadvantage because of their scant experience in financial administration, which does not augur well for the execution of the South African Schools Act (1996) (Griesel, 2001:2). In addition, many schools, particularly schools located in disadvantaged communities, did not build up any financial reserves during the Apartheid era, and therefore they have no capital to draw on now.

Section 36 of the South African Schools Act 94 of 1996 (Government Gazette No. 17579, 1996:24) makes provision for communities to be responsible for the financing of their schools. According to Griesel (2001:3), education departments are increasingly incapable of meeting the financial needs of their citizens, and therefore communities play a pivotal role in providing additional revenue for their schools. This feature of
funding of “public schools” accentuates the new role school leaders are required to assume in controlling and administrating funds in an organised and systematic manner. The role of school leaders, in particular principal-educators, has changed dramatically to embrace new ventures, such as the formulation of budgets, financial statements and reports (Griesel, 2001:4).

In addition to financial expertise, school leaders also have to be conversant with the legal side of running their schools.

### 2.2.3 Increasing need for legal expertise

According to Masitsa (2005:186), school leaders deem a mastery of lawful matters as obligatory. Since school leaders have to take responsibility for managing their schools’ labour force, it is of paramount importance that they equip themselves with knowledge about labour laws. Labour law in itself is complicated and school leaders have to grapple with new and formidable obstacles (Masitsa, 2005:187). School leaders often find themselves having to negotiate with educator unions about issues such as strikes, educator misconduct, grievances and disciplinary procedures, and therefore a fundamental command of labour law is a prerequisite for the effective management of their schools. Labour relations are becoming a focal point in education, as educators are increasingly mindful of their rights as individuals and as trade union members.

Disruptive teacher strikes have been identified as a factor contributing to the poor results in Grade Twelve, according to a study by Van der Westhuizen, Mentz, Mosoge, Nieuwoudt, Steyn, Legotlo, Maaga and Sebego (1999:318). Since 1994, more than 200 000 educators have joined unions out of choice. The Department of Education has entered into agreements with a number of educator unions about issues such as access to work place, union meetings at the work place and time off with full pay for union activities (Legotlo, Maaga, Sebego, Van der Westhuizen, Mosoge, Nieuwoudt & Steyn, 2002:146). School leaders indicated that considerable difficulties surfaced when these agreements were applied (Legotlo et al., 2002:146). Legotlo et al. (2002:146-147) found
that the school day was periodically disrupted by holding meetings with union representatives taking time off from school. The study revealed that some union representatives would use more teaching time to arrange a strike. A member of the School Governing Body made the following remark: “Teacher unions (particularly SADTU) played a most important role, as they closed the school or took teachers out of school during school hours. Principal-educators have no power over teachers, because of unions” (Legotlo et al., 2002:147).

It is crucial that school leaders familiarise themselves with the laws pertaining to all stakeholders in education. In doing so, principal-educators will be empowered and confident to handle every situation within the legal framework (Masitsa, 2005:187). School leaders are to an increasing extent expected to be versed in various aspects relating to their management duties. School leaders should be familiarised with in-depth information regarding educational law. Legislation governs or influences all aspects of school leaders’ duties as managers. It is therefore of paramount importance that school leaders, namely head educators, deputy-principals and heads of department, acquaint themselves with educational law. This will serve them well and be to their advantage as professionals as well as personnel managers (Rossouw, 2004:vi).

According to Mbatha, Grobler and Loock (2006:3), delegation as a feature of educational legislation is an element of management that could have major consequences for principal-educators and school management teams (SMTs). Communities have become much more inclined to take legal action and turn to litigation, therefore school leaders must bear in mind that every situation regarding management could lead to an indictment. Principal-educators are restricted in terms of delegating authority. The old saying: “delegates delegare non potest”, which means that a delegate cannot delegate his authority (Mbatha et al., 2006:5), still holds true. The implication for principal-educators, who have “delegated authority”, is that they may not further carelessly designate this authority. This legislation places a major limitation on school leaders by restricting them from the further designation of authority to subordinates, unless the delegates have been explicitly mandated to do so (Mbatha et al., 2006:5).
Principal-educators are sometimes baffled by the complexity of the laws regulating their mandate to delegate (Mbatha et al., 2006:6). A number of principal-educators, according to the research study conducted by Mbatha et al. (2006:11), are puzzled by legislation pertaining to delegation and display general ignorance regarding this particular law. Some school leaders participating in the aforementioned study indicated that they often designated duties when they were pressurised, often without considering whether there could be “an express or implied prohibition on delegation” pertaining to the designated duties (Mbatha et al., 2006:11).

In addition to acquiring legal expertise, school leaders are pressurised to improve the pass rates of their schools.

### 2.2.4 Pressures to improve pass rates

The public and education departments are claiming that the “academic performance” of South African learners must improve (Tucker & Codding, 2002:1). School leaders are also under constant pressure to improve the academic performance of their schools out of fear of being listed as “underachieving” schools. Tucker and Codding (2002:1) state that school leaders, particularly principal-educators, are held accountable for the performance of their learners and are consequently fearful that their learners will underperform, about the closure of their schools, as well as losing their own jobs (Tucker & Codding, 2002:7).

According to an article by Prega Govender in the *Sunday Times*, (Govender, 2010), school leaders are intentionally retaining weak learners in Grade Eleven in an attempt to increase their Matric pass rates. This article states that principal-educators were under constant pressure to better their results out of fear of being relegated or even dismissed. Education officials verified that they were mindful of the disturbing system of “gatekeeping” (Govender, 2010), which refers to the retention of weak Grade Eleven learners even though they scraped through, to guarantee that only those who are expected to pass are allowed to progress to Grade Twelve (Govender, 2010).
According to Heystek (2007:498), the principles of free enterprise are acceptable to business enterprises, but could present difficulties for schools. If free enterprise principles had to be applied and failing schools were to be closed in South Africa, the state would be failing in its responsibility to supply quality education. Parents in disadvantaged communities in both urban and rural areas have limited choices when choosing the best school for their children, who then have to suffer from inadequate amenities and equipment in these schools. While these schools cannot compare with schools in “higher socio-economic” communities, parents from sub-economic communities often cannot afford either the fees or transport costs involved in sending their children to these “better” schools. In 2006, the Director-General of the National Department of Education announced that under-performing schools would be closed. Simultaneously, the Minister of Education announced that schools with unacceptable results would be placed under management and control. This is a clear affirmation that school leaders find themselves in a Catch 22 situation, because schools that are performing poorly, are mostly those lacking resources and with restricted conveniences (Heystek, 2007:498). School leaders have no power over the type of learners that are registered at their respective schools, yet they are required to produce outcomes that match the anticipated criteria, despite all the shortcomings impacting negatively on academic performance at their schools (Heystek, 2007:499). Social problems in the community, which impact on learners, also contribute to making the task of school leadership more problematic (Bush, 2008:92).

School leaders are not only pressurised to improve the pass rate of their schools, but are also pushed by external social factors, impacting on the functioning of their schools.

2.2.5 External social pressures

Many children in South Africa struggle to learn, because they are incapacitated by hunger and poverty (Bloch, 2009:77; Bush & Oduro, 2006). Schools situated in impoverished environments have to deal with the impact this exerts on learners and their families. School leaders are faced with harsh realities, such as that many learners
come to school hungry, lacking in self-esteem or encouragement or support from parents. Conditions to study at home are either deficient or non-existent (Bloch, 2009:77; Kamper, 2008:2). Items such as books, school uniforms and shoes inevitably become non-essential items, as parents can hardly afford to buy food to feed their children (Bloch, 2009:77). Children who are undernourished will in the long run suffer the consequences of malnutrition. For example, malnutrition has an impact on children’s ability to concentrate, which could be a stumbling block in their learning (Bloch, 2009:77).

Parents are often illiterate or have low educational qualifications, are single parents or act as replacement parents, usually lacking confidence to engage in school or academic activities (Kamper, 2008:2). For example, educated parents have the capacity to assist with their children’s homework and to instill the importance of education in their children, which will impact positively on their performance and education (Maile, 2008:26).

South African society has a history of violence, which originated during the Apartheid period (Mathe, 2008:340). According to an official investigation by the Department of Education in Kwazulu-Natal (Mathe, 2008:30), schools in all nine provinces in South Africa are severely affected by violence. Educators and learners are petrified to be at school out of fear of being attacked (De Wet, 2003:89). This fearfulness and feelings of insecurity among educators and learners (Bloch, 2009:80) appear to be valid, as schools are often alluded to as “war zones” (De Wet, 2003:89-91; November et al., 2010:791). Many educators have been the victims of attacks or have been threatened by learners, who often come to school armed with dangerous weapons, such as knives and guns (De Wet, 2003:91; Mathe, 2008:34; November et al., 2010:791; Van Wyk, 2007:136). Learners are also very often the victims of serious physical abuse, sexual abuse and harassment (De Wet, 2003:91; November et al., 2010:791). A research study conducted at five primary schools in the Western Cape by Ward, Martin, Theron and Distiller (2007:166), revealed that children were exposed to high levels of violence, which could impede their academic performance. In a large number of families, violence
was found to be common or widespread, often viewed as the only or main tool to handle conflict (De Wet, 2003:93).

Poverty is a factor in the escalation of gangsterism in society (Dos Reis, 2007:45). Gangs are associated with social evils, such as prostitution and drug dealing in which children are often targeted. Schools are often used by gangs for peddling drugs, and gangs have been noted to force or abduct young girls to be used as prostitutes (Loots, 2005:13). Gangs within the school and in the surrounding areas of the school intimidate educators and learners. As a result, they are fearful of being attacked at school or after school by learners (Bloch, 2009:80; De Wet, 2003:92; Ward et al., 2007:166) or even educators who belong to gangs (De Wet, 2003:92). Gangs have a negative effect on the health of educators; some are booked off due to high levels of stress, according to a research study conducted in the Western Cape by Dos Reis (2007:57). An educator who participated in this research study, (Dos Reis, 2007:51) made the following telling comment: “At any time there can be a shooting”.

Poverty, gangs and violence are difficulties that impact on teaching and learning, as they affect the motivation of learners and the spirits of educators (Mathe, 2008:31). Principal-educators need to play a crucial role in improving or stimulating the spirits and motivation of educators (Dos Reis, 2007:26) and should view low self-esteem among educators as disastrous to teaching and learning (Dos Reis, 2007:27).

According to November et al. (2010:791), some principal-educators have been compelled to call on the Department of Education to provide security for schools. In this regard, a principal-educator in a research study (Botha, 2006:346) conducted at secondary schools in Gauteng stated:

“Principal-educators need to take control of what is happening in their schools. The only way to improve the functioning of schools, will be for the principal-educator to do something for themselves, because if they must
wait for the department or government to improve their schools, they will wait until the end of time” (Botha, 2006:346).

In summary, principal-educators are incapacitated by many challenges, such as poverty, drugs, gangsterism and violence in the surrounding community and within their schools, in their quest to advance teaching and learning. They function in an environment that robs educators and learners of safety, which is a basic human right. The war against these social evils cannot be fought alone, and principal-educators must call on learners, parents and community stakeholders, such as churches, policing forums, businesses and NGOs for support. This will require good communication skills from principal-educators, as well as the establishment of networks and relationships with all relevant stakeholders, including the Department of Social Development. The many social problems experienced by learners can be addressed only through the harnessing of the expertise and resources offered by these stakeholders.

In spite of the many social pressures that school leaders have to deal with, there is a general lack of support from the Department of Education.

2.2.6 Lack of support by Department of Education

Research by Kamper (2008:12-13) revealed a disturbing fact, namely that principals experienced problems with their specific education departments. For example, the poverty grading of schools was not done on the basis of the income of families, but on an outward inspection of the conditions of the school. Education departments were generally ignorant about the “grassroots conditions” in schools located in a high-poverty environment and did not provide proper support to these schools (Kamper, 2008:13). Kamper (2008:13) asserts that education officials need to work closely with and provide assistance to schools, for example, by helping school leaders to draw up business plans for their schools. Participating school leaders indicated that education officials were keen to implement control measures and were eager to “bask in the glory” when schools achieved success. However, many schools in poverty-stricken communities had
experienced extraordinary skirmishes with their education departments (Kamper, 2008:13).

2.2.7 Negotiating participation with school governing body and educators

Numerous instances point to unsatisfactory relations between principal-educators and parent governors of school governing bodies (SGBs) (Heystek, 2006:478; Lewis & Naidoo, 2006:422; Mncube, 2009:94; Van Wyk, 2007:134). One principal-educator in the research study conducted by Heystek (2006:478) said: “I would rather do the work myself, than to wait and expect the school governing body to do it, as I know that nothing will happen”.

Confusion about who is in control is another common source of tension between principal-educators and school governing body (SGB) members. At one rural school, parent-governors were eager to exercise their control. At this particular school, the Chairperson of the school governing body (SGB) would exercise his power by locking and unlocking the gates, directing staff members to parking areas and even turning up at classrooms, offering his assistance to educators (Heystek, 2006:480; Lewis & Naidoo, 2006:422; Van Wyk, 2007:135). Research conducted by Mncube (2009:94) revealed that the relevant parent governors were not involved in decision-making processes, which were usually dealt with by the principal-educator and the school management team (SMT). The parent governors participating in this research study (Mncube, 2009:94) stated that as they did not want to appear disloyal towards the principal-educator, they usually pretended that they had also participated in decision-making. The parents stated that the school management team (SMT) often took decisions on its own, although the impression was created that the school governing body (SGB) had participated.

Another important function of the school governing body (SGB) is the drawing up of policies, but here again many tensions can arise. Some principal-educators feel this is their responsibility, because the parent governors expect them to draw up policies
Some principal-educators are angered by this and regard this as wasting their time. They feel that they are spending time on issues that do not form part of their duties, but agree to undertake these, since it is expected of a school to have appropriate policies in place. Principal-educators become upset when parents reject the first rough draft of a policy or attempt to revise it so that they will have more influence. If the two parties do not have faith in one another, there will obviously be conflict (Heystek, 2006:481; Lewis & Naidoo, 2006:422). One participating principal-educator stated that when issues arose pertaining to policies, the principal-educator was answerable to the Department and not the Chairperson of the school governing body (SGB). Very often parents are unwilling to devise policies, especially language policies (Heystek, 2006:481).

2.2.8 Distributed Leadership and School Management Team (SMT)

Distributed leadership has become an important concept (as explained in paragraph 2.2.1); all educators should partake in decision-making, but they should also share duties and responsibilities. Collaboration and participation are important elements of distributed leadership.

Grant and Singh (2009:296) state that their research revealed that school management team (SMT) members felt it a burden to be accountable on the same basis as senior staff members and would prefer to delegate certain tasks to other staff members. One educator made the following comment: “Sometimes you feel that it’s management’s job passed onto you. I won’t consider that as leadership. It is just passing the buck”. The leadership tradition applied at the school under study had a negative impact on the educators. Duties were allocated by the school management team (SMT) to educators whom they regarded as competent to carry out these duties (Grant & Singh, 2009:297). This tradition posed an obstacle to the materialisation and creation of leaders in the school. Inexperienced educators were not given the opportunity to develop their leadership potential. This investigation (Grant & Singh, 2009:297) revealed that staff members could not take ownership of decisions, because decisions were made at
school management team (SMT) meetings. The impression was created that the staff as a whole was involved in issues by merely presenting the already made decisions to them. The study established that the climate at the school was distinctly non-participatory and lacked legitimate involvement by all staff members in formulating resolutions. Leadership in the schools under study was at the helm of the school management team (SMT), and educators were restricted by scant leadership opportunities and token participation in the decision-making process (Grant & Singh, 2009:298). It is clear from the study that there was a general disregard for the opinions and input of all staff members (Grant & Singh, 2009:298).

The school management team’s (SMT’s) task was complicated when attempting to delegate duties, because some staff members felt excluded, with no confidence in the school management team (SMT), because they regarded the leadership distributed as fake leadership. Principal-educators must therefore ensure that the whole staff becomes involved in issues and try to change the negative perceptions of some educators by creating opportunities for joint decision-making.

Principal-educators are also faced with diversity issues, given the movement of Black learners into traditionally Indian and Coloured schools. They need to be knowledgeable about handling the challenge of diversity.

2.2.9 Dealing with diversity

The general state of schools in South Africa is that Black children have moved in huge numbers into traditionally English-speaking White (Vandeyar & Killen, 2006) and Indian and Coloured (Soudien, 2004:98-99) schools. The racial outline of the teaching corps at these schools has, unfortunately, stayed the same (Vandeyar & Killen, 2006). For many Black learners, the language of learning and teaching differs from their home language (Nkomo, McKinney & Chisholm, 2004:10). This impedes learning. For South African schools to become fully desegregated, there is a need for educators, school leaders and members of society to be qualified and skilled to create and nurture a climate of
democracy. Although South Africa has been transformed into a democratic society, undemocratic practices are still present in various forms, including in education and schooling (Nkomo et al., 2004:1). Vandeyar and Killen (2006) contend that “racial hierarchies” as still present in a number of schools. A complete disregard for African languages was found at the majority of schools that participated in a research study conducted by Vandeyar and Killen (2006). The researchers noticed that learners who tried to speak any African or native language were repeatedly reprimanded for doing so, which constituted an infringement of the human rights of learners. The stereotyping of diversity, along with pessimistic attitudes, has been identified by Engelbrecht, Oswald and Forlin (2006:121) as an obstacle to participation and the provision of education of a high standard to all learners.

Educators at the schools participating in the research study expressed their concern at the fact that IsiXhosa speaking learners were taught in either English or Afrikaans. They stated that they needed support to develop effective methods to assist these learners (Engelbrecht et al., 2006:127). The researcher also identified a shortage of democratic approaches and effective programmes to attend to diversity in the schools under study (Engelbrecht et al., 2006:125). In South African schools in the twenty-first century, principal-educators must be able to deal with these issues.

Schools were crucial in catapulting South Africa from apartheid into democracy (Ntshoe, 2002). Schools still have an all-important role to play in the rebuilding process (Nkomo et al., 2004:1). This implies that the focus should be on fostering the unity and solidarity that characterise a democratic society, embracing the diversity characteristic of school management teams, educators and learners in modern-day South Africa (Niemann, 2006:103; Vandeyar & Killen, 2006). Values that are in line with democracy, such as liberalism, acceptance and respect for heterogeneity regarding the blend of cultures, languages, religions and ethnicity, should be instilled in all schools (Ntshoe, 2002). Ntshoe (2002) is of the view that, globally, multicultural education stimulates values that are mutually shared by all communities and highlight the uniformity or likeness among human beings.
A principal-educator in the study conducted by Niemann (2006:97) felt strongly that principal-educators should be trained and prepared before taking up their positions. He stated that it was quite challenging to work with a diverse group of people. He emphasized that “managers” required information on planning and dealing with diversity issues (Niemann, 2006:97). They need to get to grips with various viewpoints if they are to take charge of difference or diverseness in their organisations (Niemann, 2006:101).

The many changes experienced in South African schools explained above, demand that principal-educators be skilled in leading their schools to implement policies. They must be able to lead their schools towards becoming effective institutions in which teaching and learning are enhanced. Both educators and learners must be committed to the development of the full potential of educators and learners. Such leadership calls for a leadership theory that is underpinned by the values of democracy, participation, equality and a belief in everybody’s potential.

2.3 TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP

A school needs a leader who is able to develop a vision and provide a perspective of the future that will result in “potential followers” becoming excited and transformed (Van Zyl, Dalglis, Du Plessis, Lues & Pietersen, 2009:140). Such a vision must provide leaders and followers with a goal as well as a route towards that goal (Van Zyl et al., 2009:140). Leaders are needed who can provide a “road map”, which implies giving followers direction in terms of sketching the “destination as well as the journey” (Rowling, 2003:56).

Transformational leadership necessitates that school leaders embody the African value of ubuntu. The essence of ubuntu is regarding all people as human beings (Clarke, 2009:210) and showing concern for them, irrespective of social standing or prestige (Khoza, 2007:24; Niemann, 2006:100). A shared vision, which will unify leaders and followers, can be established through dialogue, consultation and discussion (Van Zyl et al., 2009:140). Ubuntu is underpinned by processes of consultation to find solutions to
problems. Issues are discussed until consensus is reached. The leader's task is to sum up and give guidance (Khoza, 2007:25).

The literature provides several definitions of transformational leadership:

### 2.3.1 Definitions of transformational leadership

Transformational leadership is leadership that is distributed throughout the organisation enabling every individual to accept responsibility and work together to reach shared goals, both by leading others and leading him-/herself. Transformational leadership also implies an investment in people. Investment in people denotes giving recognition to people or individuals, establishing collaborative partnerships and being persistent and tenacious with people (Clarke, 2009:210; Johns, 2009:224). It is a practice in which dedication and loyalty towards the goals of the organisation is established amongst followers and the followers are allowed to achieve these goals, an outcome of which is normally increased productivity and motivation among followers (Engels, Hotton, De Vos, Bouckenooghe & Aelterman, 2008:160-161; Stone, Russell & Patterson, 2004:350).

Achua and Lussier (2010:303-304) state that the focal point of transformational leadership is the leader’s vision, rather than the characteristics of followers. The purpose of transformational leadership, as voiced by Achua and Lussier (2010:304), is to transform the existing state of affairs in an organisation by indicating in a crystal-clear manner what the organisation could be like after the transformation process. Followers tend to accept the vision of the organisation provided by the leader and are willing to do their utmost to realise the goals, because of their confidence in and respect for him/her (Achua & Lussier, 2010:304). The abovestated authors interpret transformational leadership as a “process” through which leaders have such a positive impact that their followers, the organisation and communities, are transformed and reshaped (Achua and Lussier, 2010:304).
Kouzes and Posner (2007:122) define transformational leadership as a leadership style through which people are strongly inspired to imbue their passion and spirit into tactics that are practical. They state that transformational leadership takes place when there is reciprocal influence that increases the degree of determination and virtues. The different aspirations of leaders and followers have now become intermingled (Kouzes & Posner, 2007:122). Transformational leadership is referred to as “transforming” leadership, which eventually becomes passionate leadership, because it intensifies the degree of human behaviour and righteousness or high-mindedness that both leaders and their followers aspire to. Consequently, it has a rebuilding impact (Kouzes & Posner, 2007:122).

Singh and Lokotsch (2005:280) describe transformational leadership as a joint endeavour produced by transformational leaders in which individuals who are involved in the operations are empowered. Primarily, transformational leadership supports the reconstruction of strategies and the regeneration of dedication to attain the goals of the organisation (Singh & Lokotsch, 2005:280). The authors state that transformational leadership also relates to how leaders conduct themselves in bringing about reorganisation, which includes the following aspects: “empowerment”, involvement, collective vision, dedication and communication (Singh & Lokotsch, 2005:280).

It seems clear from the above definitions that transformational leadership is thought of as “shared or distributed leadership”. The focus of transformational leadership is on enhancing reform by means of participation from the bottom up, instead of focusing on a specific individual, such as the principal-educator, who organises and manages from the top down (Hallinger, 2003:338).
Figure 2.1 provides an overview of the main features of transformational leadership.

**FIGURE 2.1: Transformational Leadership**

![Diagram showing the process of working collaboratively with inputs and outcomes.]

**INPUT:** Investment in people, Creation of an inspirational environment

**RESULTS IN:** Collective partnerships, dedication and commitment, equality, shared goals, aspirations and achievements, empowerment, increased morale and integrity and enhanced relationships

**OUTCOMES:** Improved goal attainment – quality

### 2.3.2 Development of transformational leadership

Transformational leadership as a theory emerged around the mid-1980s, when demands were made on education systems to increase their quality and also advance
the academic performance of learners (Stewart, 2006:7; Marks & Printy, 2003:371). Research increased in terms of trying to measure the effect of school leadership. New phrases or names began to appear in reports or texts, such as shared leadership; teacher leadership; distributed leadership; and transformational leadership. The appearance of these leadership models signaled a general dissatisfaction with the former models of instructional leadership, which emphasised the school leader as the focal point of skills, control and influence.

During the 1990s, scholars switched their focus to leadership styles that were more consistent with the developing tendencies in pedagogic restructuring, namely “empowerment, shared leadership and organisational learning” (Stewart, 2006:8). Transformational leadership was regarded as the model foremost in the production of evidence of empowerment, shared leadership and organisational learning (Stewart, 2006:8).

2.3.3 Principles of transformational leadership

The following four principles of transformational leadership were generally identified by several authors (Herzog & Zimmerman, 2009; Kirkbride, 2006; Pounder, 2006; Van Eeden, Cilliers & Van Deventer, 2008): idealised influence; inspirational motivation; intellectual stimulation; and individual consideration. An explication of the four principles is presented below:

2.3.3.1 Idealised influence

Herzog and Zimmerman (2009:40) affirm that idealised influence pertains to the way in which a leader is perceived by other individuals or their followers. Transformational leaders earn the trust, confidence, admiration and high regard of others. Their subordinates have a high opinion of such leaders and desire to emulate them. Such leaders display strong moral values and principles. Transformational leaders are exemplary in every respect, thus becoming the ideal of others. Such leaders ensure that
they form close bonds with others or their followers by prioritising the needs of others, disregarding their own needs. Leaders with these qualities illustrate the importance of ethics by practising openness and integrity in all aspects of the organisation.

2.3.3.2 Inspirational motivation

Inspirational motivation pertains to the capacity of a leader to give value and stimulation to the contributions of their followers. There are various ways in which leaders can motivate others in an organisation, but transformational leaders regard intrinsic motivation as being of prime importance. Gill (2006:236) defines intrinsic motivation as when people are inspired by their innate needs, such as personal happiness; when one’s work is intriguing; and when one feels confident that one’s contribution is making a difference in the organisation. Gill (2006:236-237) argues that intrinsic motivation pertains to three deep-rooted “psychological needs”, namely proficiency, independence and interconnectedness. Herzog and Zimmerman (2009:40) state that it is vital to encourage others to achieve contentment and fulfillment through the accomplishment of their goals. Inspirational motivation is concerned with making others feel appreciated and acknowledging that their contributions are beneficial, so as to increase intrinsic motivation.

2.3.3.3 Intellectual stimulation

Herzog and Zimmerman (2009:40) affirm that the suggestions, ideas and opinions of others are key to establishing a collective vision for an organisation. Individuals must be given the space to generate solutions in order to overcome any obstacles in attaining the collective vision. They must be given the freedom to present their views and made to feel confident that their opinions will not be attacked or run down. By encouraging involvement, followers are taking ownership of the suggestions they have made. By taking ownership, individuals can review the positive and negative outcomes and develop recommendations for advancement and progress.
2.3.3.4 Individualised consideration

Transformational leaders acknowledge that one of their chief functions is to assist their followers in developing and accomplishing their goals. They are more concerned about the achievements of others than about their own idiosyncratic achievements. It is important to determine the needs of others so that strategies can be developed to satisfy these. Needs could be determined by arranging group or individual meetings with followers, because the creation of opportunities for interaction with others could result in more positive relationships (Herzog & Zimmerman, 2009:41).

2.3.4 Characteristics of transformational leaders

A transformational leader is defined by Clarke (2009:212) and Johns (2009:224) as an individual who seeks to function as a servant leader. His/Her purpose is therefore to serve others. A transformational leader must be a good listener and possess the ability to identify with others. In addition to this, resilience and the ability to give direction are important. Transformational leaders are leaders who are characterised by quiet thought or contemplation, so that they become professionals of reflection (Johns, 2009:224). According to Friedman (2004:206) and Gill (2006:53), transformational leaders display out-of-the-ordinary capabilities of some kind. They are leaders who show more concern for the needs of others than for their own. Gill (2006:53) states that they reveal strong values and morals in their interactions with people. They enjoy the confidence, faith and high regard of their followers, resulting in them becoming exemplary leaders with whom people can identify.

A distinctive characteristic of transformational leadership, according to Van Eeden et al. (2008:254), is the communication of a vision as a vehicle for motivating others. Clarke (2009:213) contends articulating the vision entails “dialogue and conversation”. Dialogue is described by McKeown’s Collins Concise English Dictionary (2008:452) as an interchange of ideas on a specific topic. Opportunities must be created for individuals to meet in order to discuss and share opinions, so that an environment of trust can be
created (Clarke, 2009:213; Magner, 2008:132). Friedman (2009:206) states that creative leaders motivate all role-players to view difficulties in a fresh manner by requesting all individuals to be collectively involved in the process of change. A learning community is thus established, in which educators share and develop teaching and learning so that they can improve their practice. They begin to function as a unit, and their interactive relationships secure trust, which is evident of a spirit of willingness to take risks.

According to Magner (2008:131), a transformational leader must have the capacity to develop what she refers to as transformational environments. Transformational environments consist of building a web of relationships and learning to control and foster new webs of relationships. The ability to lose themselves in the situation and to be responsive to intricacies is required of transformational leaders (Magner, 2008:131). Fundamental principles such as conversations, relationships and learning are embraced in these transformational environments. School leadership will of necessity adopt a more collaborative style, because school leaders find themselves in an environment characterised by ambiguity and uncertainty (Herbst, 2007:86).

The key ingredient underlying the importance of the transformational leader is possibly the essence and power of his/her emotional effect on other people (Herbst, 2007:87). Theories on transformational leadership seem to imply that there is a strong emotional bond between leaders and followers, so that followers relate to the leader and will do everything in their power to realise the mission of the organisation. According to Herbst (2007:88), Bass (1990) suggests that transformational leaders should hold several kinds of intelligence and that social and emotional intelligence is pivotal to leaders’ potential to be of inspiration to their followers and to construct relationships.

Rowling (2003:8) states that transformational leaders will definitely possess the ambition and desire to distinguish themselves and will do everything in their power to attain their desires. They will not settle for second best and will not rest until they have achieved what they have set out to achieve. Self-esteem, participation and enthusiasm
are traits that transformational leaders develop in their organisations (Rowling, 2003:11). In schools, they exhibit the following characteristics: inspiration, motivation, self-restraint, strong-mindedness and dedication (Rowling, 2003:11).

According to Barker (2007:29), transformational leaders concentrate on growing leaders inside their schools by sharing responsibilities, which is also linked to involvement in decision-making. Barker (2007:29) states that these leaders support an interdependence or “interconnectedness”. The myriad of opinions from their subordinates are blended into a shared vision or shared goals, where everybody is working in collaboration producing an organisational ‘bustle’. Collaboration is defined as attempting to find resolutions to problems in an efficient manner. It also implies discussing problems explicitly when trying to find resolutions (Johns, 2009:131). Achua and Lussier (2010:193) discuss collaborators who are keen to locate the best panacea that will satisfy all relevant stakeholders. The premise of collaboration is candid and sincere communication (Achua & Lussier, 2010:193).

Murphy, Goldring, Cravens, Elliott and Porter (2007:20) view communication as key to establishing a climate of “learning and professional behaviour” in schools. In their opinion, communication that is transparent and appropriate will result in the establishment of an interconnected community between leaders, educators and learners. Strong professional communities can surface only when contemplative discourse becomes part of the activities of the school and in which the leadership must partake in these discourses (Murphy et al., 2007:20). Khoza (2007:25) states that African cultures tend to have a high regard for interdependence, instead of independence as is evidenced from the following idiomatic expression: “One finger cannot pick up a grain” implying that one will accomplish more with synergism and joint action. In the African custom, discussions and debates are practised by traditional leaders, especially when thorny issues need to be resolved (Khoza, 2007:25). A recent newspaper article on Nelson Mandela mentioned that his leadership epitomises the following qualities: morality, compassion and self-effacement. He is noted to practise
the principles of dialogue and understanding and avoids enforcement and dominance (Khoza, 2007:26).

Transformational leaders capture the trust of people through coaching, inspiring and empowering others (Laurent & Bradney, 2007:123). Empowerment is described as having reliability, fulfillment in achievements, influence over what and how to do things, acknowledgement for opinions and suggestions, and the confidence that one is being valued and appreciated. Recently, empowerment has been expanded to incorporate aspects such as sharing control, invigorating workers, “self-efficacy” and strengthening possibilities for intrinsic motivation (Gill, 2006:211). Singh and Lokotsch (2005:282) offer a similar explanation, stating that empowerment essentially means distributing power. Empowerment implies viewing every individual as a leader, enhancing collaboration and making others stronger by encouraging participation. This entails capacities such as to hold one’s own or to subsist; the generation of modifications by leaders and followers; the use of influence; and ensuring that others are developed (Singh & Lokotsch, 2005:282). Empowerment also encapsulates the two tenets, of transformational leadership, namely individualised consideration and intellectual stimulation, as described in Bass’s model (Gill, 2006:212).
FIGURE 2.2: Characteristics of a transformational leader

Compassion, trust, understanding, receptive, serves others

- Rational thinker
- Logical reasoning
- Creative
- Proactive

- Dialogue and conversations,
- Good listener
- Builds collaborative relationships

- Frontrunner in promoting change for others
- Is resilient
- Gives direction
- Motivates others to review complexities in a new manner
2.3.5 Suitability of transformational leadership as a theoretical framework for this study

My prime reason for choosing transformational leadership is because the principles of action research are congruent with the principles of transformational leadership. I was involved with a project that had action research as its methodology and paradigm; therefore, any theory I chose, had to be suited to the critical paradigm underlying action research. The essence of educational action research is the obligation to advance education through the systematic application of cycles of learning (Mitchell, Reilly & Logue, 2009:345; Alpert & Bechar, 2007:231). Like action research, the process of transformational leadership also revolves around the identification of problems, finding solutions to the problems and collaborating with roleplayers, aiming to enhance the performance of the organisation (Marks & Printy, 2003:372).

The features of action research, namely collaboration, reflection and critique, can come to fruition only in a democratic setting (Gordon, 2008:6). Democratic practices in terms of allowing participation in decision-making is essential (Gordon, 2008:6). The following values underpin action research and the notion of transformational leadership:

2.3.5.1 Democracy

Democracy, a guiding value for action research, implies that individuals should be able to perform their activities and make informed decisions, by allowing everyone to become involved. Options and choices must be made on the basis of logical reasoning and relevant information (Mncube & Harber, 2010:615). Individuals must be encouraged to re-examine issues and to be prepared to change their thinking, which is in line with intellectual stimulation, in terms of which leaders should utilise a questioning approach instead of a telling approach (Kirkbride, 2006:26).
### 2.3.5.2 Participation

Individuals must be allowed to participate or to be involved in the decision-making process. Democracy is practised in action research by the involvement of all individuals in a topic of concern as well as in the actual investigation process (Jacobs, 2010:370). These individuals are not only the focus of the research, but also provide or contribute information and interpretation (Jacobs, 2010:370). The fact that individuals contribute information, is in accord with the principle of intellectual stimulation of transformational leadership, in terms of which leaders encourage followers to think about issues and advance their own capacities (Kirkbride, 2006:26).

### 2.3.5.3 Equality

Gordon (2008:171) contends that balanced relationships are an indication of democracy in action research. These relationships are based on equality; everybody is regarded as equal, and no hierarchies/grading exist. Bargal (2006:384) affirms equality as a principle of action research, which means that all the individuals in the research process have equal say. Leaders with idealised influence have faith and confidence in their followers and regard their followers and their inputs as valuable assets (Kirkbride, 2006:27).

### 2.3.5.4 Collaboration

Working as a collective is also an important feature of action research (AR), according to Koshy (2010:45). Those in positions of leadership should show regard and respect for the views and inputs of everybody and should recognise the important role that everyone plays in an organisation. Skills such as listening to others and sharing viewpoints and information are prerequisites for all “co-researchers” (Koshy, 2010:45). Features of action research such as showing regard and respect for others are in accord with the individualised consideration of transformational leadership. Action research favours an interconnection between individuals, because working collectively will result in gaining much more (Brydon-Miller, Greenwood & Maguire, 2003:14). These
investigations reveal that research participants began to see that their interconnectedness made them far stronger and more forceful than their individual strengths (Brydon-Miller et al., 2003:14).

Collaboration and collective action have the capacity to be empowering through the democratic styles and methods employed. These styles are often referred to as transformational styles. “Transformational approaches” are typified by “dialogue” and “high levels of participation” (Jacobs, 2010:370).

Secondly, I chose transformational leadership as a concept for framing my study, because Section 16(1) of the South African Schools Act (84 of 1996) stipulates that the governance of a public school is the responsibility of the School Governing Body (SGB). The school governing body (SGB) now has authority in decision-making processes by allowing all role-players to be involved and be part of joint decision-making (Singh & Lokotsch, 2005:279) (see paragraph 2.2.6 for a discussion on the need for collaboration between school leadership and SGBs).

Thirdly, over the last two decades, much research has been conducted on transformational leadership, and it has been shown to be positively related to performance (Bass & Riggio, 2006:46; Pillai & Williams, 2004:144; Marks & Priinty, 2003:375). This research has not been limited to school management, but has included studies from other fields, such as health care and sport (Bass & Riggio, 2006:46; Pillai & Williams, 2004:144). School leaders are pushed to improve the academic performance of their schools and are obliged to become transformational leaders.

Fourthly, in the changing and diversified school contexts prevalent in South Africa today, transformational leadership is required to ensure that diversity is celebrated and promoted, while upholding the quality of education. In short, transformational leadership is required in order to help schools transform into centres of educational excellence, despite the many challenges facing education in South Africa.
2.4 CONCLUSION

Chapter Two provided a literature review on some of the many challenges facing school leadership in South Africa. Transformational leadership was described and a justification was given for selecting transformational leadership as suitable for the current conditions in South African education. Chapter Three will present a theoretical discussion of the research design followed in this study.
CHAPTER THREE

THEORETICAL DISCUSSION OF SELECTED RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

In Chapter Two, a literature review regarding the many challenges facing school leadership in South Africa was provided. A theoretical framework of transformational leadership with reference to literature was also presented. In this chapter, an explication of the research design and methodology that was applied in this research investigation will be provided. The purpose of the study will be explained, followed by a discussion of the chosen research design and methodology. The chapter will conclude with an explanation of the measures taken to ensure trustworthiness and adherence to ethical requirements.

3.2 PURPOSE OF RESEARCH

The purpose of this research investigation was to explore how school leaders could be assisted in addressing issues that impacted negatively on the functioning of their schools, by adopting an Action Research (AR) approach.

This research investigation aimed to describe and explain the action research process as experienced by school leaders in order to ascertain the potential usefulness of action research as a tool in assisting school leadership to tackle problematic issues at their schools.

3.2.1 Main research question
What are the potential benefits of an action research approach to improving school functioning?

3.2.2 Secondary research questions

What are the experiences of school leaders as they implement an action research project to address an issue that is negatively impacting on school functioning?

What are the challenges facing school leaders in the implementation of an action research approach to addressing problematic issues in their schools?

What recommendations can be made with regard to the use of action research as a tool for assisting school leaders in addressing issues that impact negatively on school functioning?

3.3 RESEARCH DESIGN

The research design can be defined as an outline of the complete investigation procedure, starting with the fundamental beliefs and notions of the investigator. It describes in detail the choice of respondents, the data collection methods to be employed, as well as how the data analysis will be conducted (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005:25; Maree, 2007:70).

3.3.1 Theoretical paradigms

Bogdan and Biklen (2003:31) state that the research paradigm is a general term that denotes the line of reasoning and the conceptual frame of reference of the research investigation. This research investigation is located mainly within an interpretive research framework, but has also been influenced by critical theory.
3.3.1.1 Interpretive paradigm

The interpretive paradigm is also referred to as the “naturalistic paradigm” (Basit, 2010:14). Basit (2010:14) explains that, although an interpretive paradigm differs from the more traditional positivistic approach, it nevertheless is just as rigorous. Henning (2004:21) defines the interpretive approach as follows:

“Interpretive research is fundamentally concerned with meaning and it seeks to understand social members’ definitions and understanding of situations. The interpretive paradigm does not concern itself with the search for broadly applicable laws and rules, but rather seeks to produce descriptive analyses that emphasise deep, interpretive understanding of social phenomena.”

This research investigation is in accord with this definition of Henning (2004:21), as it seeks to explore and describe the experiences of school leaders as they implement an action research project to address a particular issue that is negatively impacting on the functioning of the school. The interpretive paradigm was of particular significance to me, as I attempted to gain understanding and insight into how exposure to the action research project was experienced by the school leaders. By gaining an understanding, the investigator is empowered to become part of the respondents’ world, to make sense of their thoughts and feelings (Stringer, 2004:27). The interpretive paradigm is particularly important with regard to education, because it allows researchers to comprehend the views and attitudes of individuals. These views should be taken seriously, if we are resolute about finding solutions to the many pressing challenges that are currently confronting South African schools (Stringer, 2004:26).

Basit (2010:14) points out that the interpretive paradigm is based on the stance that human actions necessitate a description and explication of individuals from their own viewpoints (Basit, 2010:14). The focus is a thorough investigation of “human behaviour” and their beliefs, as well as an acceptance of distinctions and likeness; therefore, small
numbers are utilised. Investigators aim to understand “social reality” from the angle of the respondents (Basit, 2010:14). Basit (2010:15) explains that this situation is coined “as double hermeneutic, indicating the interpretation of an already interpreted world”. In other words, the researcher endeavours to interpret how the participants interpret their own social reality.

The interpretive paradigm therefore illuminates the meanings that are given to the experiences of individuals; in other words, the significance of what their experiences mean to the research subjects (Maree, 2007:21). The actions of individuals are brought about by social practices; therefore, an understanding of these is required, because the link between the behaviour and thinking of research participants is not always apparent to researchers who have different theoretical and life frames of reference (Maree, 2007:21). An interpretive paradigm is usually closely associated with a phenomenological approach (see 3.3.2.1).

3.3.1.2 Critical theory

This study was also influenced by another paradigm, namely critical theory (Clough & Nutbrown, 2002:15). Critical theory is associated with the political standpoint that individuals and groups of individuals in communities are in need of emancipation from some sort of oppression. Based on this assumption, qualitative investigators working in a critical paradigm would claim that they strive to transform individuals and communities (Clough & Nutbrown, 2002:15). The intention of critical theory is to raise participants’ awareness of specific aspects of society and life that are oppressing their potential, so that they may be in a better position to take action to free themselves from such oppression (Freire, 1993). Inequalities and prejudice need to be addressed by empowering individuals through increasing their critical awareness and autonomy (Basit, 2010:15). Critical theory therefore forms an essential element of the interpretive paradigm (Basit, 2010:15), as participants’ awareness of the need to change is heightened by the interpretive analysis of their social situations. I chose critical theory as a paradigm, because I strongly believed that school leaders should be emancipated
and transformed. School leaders may at times feel powerless in their struggle with issues and challenges. My aim with this research was to create an awareness that school leaders could set themselves free from the shackles in which they were trapped. Another reason for my selection of critical theory is that it strives to promote liberation and independence for the amelioration of the social conditions of every person and communities.

A qualitative research design was most appropriate to use for this research investigation, as it examined and explicated the experiences of school leaders.

### 3.3.2 Qualitative research design

Qualitative investigators apply a naturalistic and an interpretive paradigm to make sense of human experiences (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005:7). They are often influenced by a multitude of research paradigms. They also appear to have a high regard for and therefore embrace several research methods and techniques, such as observation, interviews and qualitative questionnaires (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005:7). The field of qualitative research is fashioned by numerous stances regarding ethics and politics, according to Denzin and Lincoln (2005:7). Several distinct fields make use of qualitative research, as qualitative research cannot be situated in one field only (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005:7). Qualitative research does not have precise techniques or processes that are altogether its own. For example, qualitative investigators utilise “narrative, content analysis and case studies.” They also make use of figures, diagrams, tabulation and charts (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005:7). They turn to a plethora of procedures, techniques and strategies, such as phenomenology, ethnography, interviews, observation and field notes. All these procedures are frequently used, as they are significant sources of information and assist in creating awareness and understanding of what is being studied (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005:7). A typical qualitative researcher will very seldom deploy just a single paradigm or a single data gathering tool. For this reason, Denzin and Lincoln (2005:7) talk about qualitative research as “many things at the same time”.
Qualitative methods are fashioned to investigate the real-life experiences of individuals (Polkinghorne, 2005:138). The primary concern of a qualitative inquiry is to give a portrayal of the experiences of individuals, according to Polkinghorne (2005:138). For this purpose, a phenomenological approach is often utilised.

3.3.2.1 Phenomenology

Qualitative research originated in phenomenology, which views “social reality” as distinctive and exclusive (Ary et al., 2006:25). This method views human beings and their world as so interrelated that the one is dependent on the other to exist (Ary et al., 2006:25). Groenewald (2004:5) holds that “describe” is the key word in phenomenology. The objective of the investigator is to give an exact or precise explanation of the event, as well as stating the facts as truthfully as possible. Making sense of “social and psychological” events from the frame of reference of the respondents is significant to the investigator. What is also of interest to the investigator are what Groenewald (2004:5) refers to as the “lived experiences” (Moletsane, 2011:13) of the respondents regarding what is being investigated.

Phenomenology is positioned within the Weberian custom, which accentuates “verstehen”, which can be translated as a deep understanding of social reality as perceived by the participants. Phenomenological investigators seek to make sense of the incidents and events of individuals in particular circumstances (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003:23). Bogdan and Biklen (2003:23) observe that an investigation from a phenomenological perspective starts with what they call “silence”. With this “silence”, they are trying to see what it is that they are actually investigating. This also implies that phenomenologists enter their investigations acknowledging that they are eager to learn and gain knowledge from the individuals that they are studying. It means that they put aside any preconceived beliefs and ideas they may have had about the individuals that they are investigating. Their focus is on making sense of a situation according to the meaning that those participants or individuals have of a situation, in other words, “seeing through the eyes of the participants” (Maree, 2007:51). Phenomenologists
foreground the individual and personal side of human behavior (Bogdan and Biklen, 2003:23). Phenomenologists also assume that there are numerous ways of understanding experiences, and that the real world initiates from our interpretation of the essence of our experiences (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003:23).

Phenomenology was appropriate for my research investigation, as I was keen to determine how the action research project had been experienced by the school leaders, taking into account that the contexts of the schools under study were somewhat different. As a phenomenological investigator, I was keen to know and be clear how action research had been discerned by school leaders and to describe it accordingly.

### 3.3.2.2 Characteristics of a qualitative design

There are various characteristics that typify a qualitative approach to research. These can be described as follows:

- **Natural setting**

  Qualitative research is usually carried out in the natural setting of the participants; in this case, in the classroom, school or institution, where participants carry out their normal day-to-day practices. The investigator should interact with the respondents by going to their natural setting (Ary *et al.*, 2006:453). The investigation is therefore not faked or unnatural and the investigator cannot or does not have control over the actions or responses that are elicited (Ary *et al.*, 2006:453). Behaviour can best be comprehended when it is discerned in the normal way in which it happens (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003:4) and actions and behaviours are influenced by the environment in which it happens (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003:5).

  Qualitative research as a methodology is rooted in the assumption that the “social world” differs from the “natural world”. Social reality is subjective, because it is dependent on the viewpoints, knowledge, understanding and responses of individuals.
Qualitative research is based on the notion that “social reality” is not a static, universal truth, but is developed by means of the experiences of individuals (Basit, 2010:16).

In qualitative research, individuals are the prime focus of the research investigation. In order for the investigator to make sense of the behaviours of individuals, the investigator and respondents interact in their “natural” setting (Maree, 2007:51). The emphasis is on the “depth” and breadth of information and not on the number of participants, as is the case in quantitative research (Maree, 2007:51). In this study, I called on the participating schools, which enriched my understanding of the schools and particularly their context, as educators were the primary focal point of my study. I believe that this was necessary to establish the authenticity of my research investigation.

- **Role of researcher**

In explaining the task of the investigator, Lodico, Spaulding and Voegtle (2010:161) suggest that qualitative investigators should strive to develop close and trusting relations with the participants. The investigator plays a pivotal role in the explication of the actions and responses discerned (Best & Kahn, 2003:241) and is also the main tool for collecting and analysing data, as the main concern of the investigator is making sense of the meaning that participants give to a particular phenomenon. In this study, as a qualitative investigator, an attempt was made to build sound and trusting relationships with all the educators. As I needed to explicate the behaviours and responses of the participating educators, it was important to me to be mindful of my role as the major instrument in gathering and analysing the data.
Focus on whole picture

Qualitative investigators endeavour to grasp a situation by concentrating on the whole picture, instead of “breaking it down into variables”. The aim is a “holistic picture” and an extensive comprehension, instead of gathering statistics on a single variable (Ary et al., 2006:31). Events are viewed in such a way so as to see the complete picture, because individual and institutional actions and behaviours form an intricate interconnectedness (Best & Kahn, 2003:242). Qualitative research implies that the features, attributes or aspects of a situation or event are investigated in order to gain a better insight and explication (Henning, 2004:5; Clough & Nutbrown, 2002:19). The investigator makes sense of the data gathered by seeing the complete picture and by modifying the ‘thin description’ of the event into what is referred to as the “thick description” in qualitative research (Henning, 2004:6).

“A thick description gives an account of the phenomenon that is coherent and that gives more than the facts and empirical content, but that also interprets the information in the light of other empirical information in the same study, as well as from the basis of a theoretical framework that locates the study” (Henning, 2004:6).

A comprehensive portrayal of events, happenings and occurrences permits the investigator to become aware of the meaning of the experiences of their respondents, and to gain knowledge regarding their lived experience, often referred to as “social reality” (Ary et al., 2006:25). I was particularly concerned about and prioritised the meaning that the participants attached to their experiences; therefore, I had to consider all the features of my study in such a way as to see everything in its totality. I wished to gain information and learn what reality meant for these educators – what the reality of factors was that impacted on them in their daily lives.
• **Context and meaning**

The regard for “context and meaning” by the qualitative investigator suggests that individual actions are connected to social, historical and traditional factors. Therefore, a qualitative investigation is always tied to a specific condition (Ary *et al.*, 2006:453). Qualitative investigators do not try to make predictions about the future, but instead try to comprehend the lived experiences of participants. Supporters of qualitative investigations claim that quantitative methods of individual experiences attempt to separate individual actions from their circumstances, in other words they take part in “context stripping” (Ary *et al.*, 2006:453; Bogdan & Biklen, 2003:4). This is the reason why Best and Kahn (2003:243) speak about qualitative investigations as being so powerful. The data gathered cannot be applied universally, nor is it all-inclusive; rather, it is unique and exclusive. In this respect, Best and Kahn (2003:243) concur that:

> “Because something occurs in one classroom at a particular school and at a particular time does not mean that similar occurrences should be expected elsewhere or even in the same classroom at another time.”

As a qualitative investigator concerned about the context of the study, I realised that in order to describe the experiences of the school leaders, I had to gain insight into their historical background. This enabled me, for example, to understand why schools chose to cite certain issues. The history, social and traditional factors of the schools were not the same, but varied tremendously.

• **Inductive analysis**

When undertaking a qualitative inquiry, data is analysed inductively. Theory or concepts are developed from data that has been gathered and classified into themes or patterns (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003:6). The investigators make a concerted effort to scrutinise the data, without any predetermined notions (Best & Kahn, 2003:243). The investigators posit themselves as impartial and attempt to learn from the experiences of the
participants. Through this approach, what is real for the participant is unearthed without any prejudice on the part of the investigator (Best & Kahn, 2003:243). This is clearly, according to Best and Kahn (2003:243), the reverse of the “logical-positivistic approach”, in terms of which the researcher enters the study with a definite hypothesis that they try to prove as ‘truth’. An intense effort was made in this study to examine the data without any preconceived ideas and to remain objective. I also made an attempt to learn from the experiences of the participants, as I was keen to discover their reality as events happened at their schools.

- Emergent design

The investigation process in qualitative research is “emergent”. The investigation process may change after the investigator enters the field, since data gathered may lead to a change in the research focus or questions (Creswell, 2009:175-176). Although all features or facets of the investigation process are planned before the investigator gathers any data, and certain characteristics of the study are described in general before the investigation begins, what has been planned originally may change, due to meanings being ascribed to the emergent themes. The research methods are often adjusted, that is why it is often called an “emergent design” (Ary et al., 2006:454).

Quite a great deal of uncertainty confronts the qualitative investigator in terms of the data that can be collected in a particular situation (Ary et al., 2006:454). Predictions of what will happen are impossible, until the investigator sees what is actually happening in the location of the research investigation. For example, the investigator may adapt the research questions and the data collection techniques (Creswell, 2009:176). The intention is to collect data by focusing the investigation on the matters of the respondents (Creswell, 2009:176). The knowledge that is generated, will depend on the kind and variety of “interactions” between the investigator, respondents and the location (Ary et al., 2006:454). In this research investigation, the data collection methods and the research process were carried out according to the initial plan. I did, however, modify the primary research question.
3.4 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research method points more to the technical side of the research investigation, such as the sampling and data collection techniques, the data analysis tools and measures to ensure trustworthiness (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003:31).

3.4.1 Sampling

Sampling denotes a certain part of the population that has been chosen for the research investigation (Maree, 2007:70). In qualitative research, sample sizes are generally small. Sampling is an adjustable, versatile, ongoing and sustained process until the “data saturation” point is reached, meaning until new information becomes unnecessary (Maree, 2007:79). Investigators cannot investigate the entire population of the group (in this case, all school leaders in Port Elizabeth). A sample may therefore be described as a smaller group, very often – not all the time – representing the population (Basit, 2010:49). Non-probability sampling is assumed when the intention is not to generalise findings to a larger population, but the investigation is focused on a specific group (Somekh & Lewin, 2005:218-219). Non-probability sampling is widespread in qualitative methods, such as action research (Somekh & Lewin, 2005:219).

The sample refers to a certain part or category of the population that has been selected by the investigator for a specific purpose (Lodico et al., 2010:134; Somekh & Lewin, 2005:219). Somekh and Lewin (2005:219) claim that “in purposive sampling, cases are handpicked for a specific reason”. The objective of purposive sampling is to opt for individuals who can come up with abundant and accurate data to assist in answering the research questions (Lodico et al., 2010:134). The sample selected in this study consisted of the school leaders who were involved with a specific project aimed at school improvement.

The Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University approached the Department of Education to investigate the possibility of working with specific schools to help them improve
teaching and learning in certain crucial areas and to improve school leadership. Several
schools were identified as suitable for participation in the project. The principals of the
relevant schools were invited to a meeting to inform them of the integrated school
project. Meetings were subsequently arranged with the principals and presentations
were arranged for the staff at the schools. In the end, nine schools in total opted to
participate in the project on improving school functioning through leadership
development, the focus of this study. In this case, one could argue that availability
sampling was the ultimate sampling procedure (Grinnell & Unrau, 2008). Convenience
or opportunity sampling, in Basit’s view (2010:52), can be explained as a sample that
the investigator can reach with ease to collect data. It may therefore be argued that this
sample does not represent the broader population and can therefore not be
generalised. It nonetheless does not imply selecting anyone (Basit, 2010:52). Creswell
(2007:127) states further that by using this method of sampling, one could avoid
spending too much time, money and effort at the expense of information and credibility.

**Context of schools**

For the purpose of the research investigation, the schools were referred to as indicated
below. A brief description of the nine schools that participated in the action research
project will now be given.

Schools 1, 2, and 4, described in Table 3.1 below, are situated in the Northern Areas of
Port Elizabeth. These areas were previously known as “Coloured” areas, as they came
about because of the forced removals that took place during the Apartheid era. School 3
is situated in an area close to Port Elizabeth, known as Uitenhage, and is also situated
in a historically “Coloured” area. Schools 5, 6 and 7 are situated in the Black townships
of Port Elizabeth. During the Apartheid era, Black people were forced to live in these
townships following the implementation of the Group Areas Act. Schools 8 and 9 are
also located in the Coloured area of Port Elizabeth, commonly referred to as the
Northern Areas.
TABLE 3.1: Characteristics of Primary Schools

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Designation</th>
<th>Learners demographics</th>
<th>Educator demographics</th>
<th>Socio-economic contextual challenges and assets</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School 1</td>
<td>1115 learners, hailing from different areas in the Northern Areas</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>Poverty; 90% of the parents are unemployed; community upliftment projects a priority.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School 2</td>
<td>864 learners, hailing from different areas of Port Elizabeth</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>Poverty; unemployment and illiterate parents; parents were single parents and grandparents.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School 3</td>
<td>800 learners, traveling distances to school from mostly townships</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Poverty; 40% of the learners came from poor homes, with many social and financial problems, as parents were mostly single or grandparents with limited incomes. Resources such as a computer laboratory were deficient.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School 4</td>
<td>1039 learners, hailing from various areas of Port Elizabeth</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Poverty and unemployment. Many of the learners’ parents received social grants. The school, however, had resources such as a library, computer room and a science laboratory, which were inadequately equipped.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School 5</td>
<td>1010 learners, hailing from the surrounding informal settlements</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>Poverty; 80% of the parents were unemployed. Alcohol, drug abuse and sexual abuse (inter alia due to a lack of privacy in homes) were rife. The school had a computer laboratory. It was also a tourism stop for Calabash Tours, which assisted in raising funds for the school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School 6</td>
<td>700 learners, hailing from the surrounding community in a Black township</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Poverty; 80% of parents were unemployed. Some households were headed by children, due to HIV/AIDS. Had resources such as a library and a computer room.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School 7</td>
<td>692 learners, hailing from the surrounding community</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>Poverty, unemployment; child-headed households, due to HIV/AIDS; some received social grants. Short of resources</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### TABLE 3.2: Characteristics of High Schools

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Designation</th>
<th>Learner demographics</th>
<th>Educator Demographics</th>
<th>Socio-economic contextual challenges and assets</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School 8</td>
<td>710 learners, hailing from the former Black townships</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Poverty, as school was surrounded by a poor working class community known for its gangsterism, drug and alcohol abuse; several shebeens and taverns operated in the immediate area.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School 9</td>
<td>1 350 learners, hailing from different areas in Port Elizabeth</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>Poverty, unemployment, gangsterism, alcohol and drug abuse were fairly common in this community. This area was feared by many and regarded as very dangerous. A small house would often be shared by up to five families.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Details regarding the participants from the various schools will be presented in the tables below:

### TABLE 3.3: Participants in project at School 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Educators</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Position</td>
<td>Principal</td>
<td>Deputy Principal</td>
<td>Head of Department</td>
<td>Head of Department</td>
<td>Head of Department</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic Qualifications</td>
<td>ACE (Management)</td>
<td>Matric + 5 years</td>
<td>Matric + 4 years</td>
<td>Matric + 4 years, ACE (Remedial)</td>
<td>Matric + 4 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Years of teaching experience</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### TABLE 3.4: Participants in project at School 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Educators</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Position</td>
<td>Principal</td>
<td>Deputy Principal</td>
<td>Head of Department</td>
<td>Head of Department</td>
<td>Head of Department</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic qualifications</td>
<td>B.A., ACE (Hons)</td>
<td>B.Ed. (Hons)</td>
<td>B.Ed. (Hons)</td>
<td>B.Ed. (Hons)</td>
<td>Matric + 3 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Years of teaching experience</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### TABLE 3.5: Participants in project at School 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Educators</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Position</td>
<td>Principal</td>
<td>Deputy Principal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic qualifications</td>
<td>NPDE Diploma Educational Management ACE (Leadership and Management)</td>
<td>B.Ed. (Hons)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Years of teaching experience</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### TABLE 3.6: Participants in project at School 4

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<th>3</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Position</td>
<td>Deputy Principal</td>
<td>Head of Department</td>
<td>Head of Department</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic qualifications</td>
<td>Primary Teacher's Diploma B.A.</td>
<td>Matric + 4 years</td>
<td>B. Paed. B.Ed.(Hons)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Years of teaching experience</td>
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TABLE 3.7: Participants in project at School 5

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<td>Female</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Position</td>
<td>Principal</td>
<td>Head of Department</td>
<td>Post Level 1</td>
<td>Post Level 1</td>
<td>Post Level 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic qualifications</td>
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<td>B.A. ACE</td>
<td>Senior Primary Teacher’s Diploma</td>
<td>B.A.</td>
<td>B.A. (Hons)</td>
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<td>18</td>
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</table>

TABLE 3.8: Participants in project at School 6

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<td>Female</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Position</td>
<td>Principal</td>
<td>Deputy Principal</td>
<td>Head of Department</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic qualifications</td>
<td>B.A. (Hons) ACE (Management)</td>
<td>Primary Teacher’s Certificate</td>
<td>B.A.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>34</td>
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TABLE 3.9: Participants in project at School 7

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<tbody>
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<td>Gender</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Position</td>
<td>Principal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic qualifications</td>
<td>Primary Teacher's Diploma B.A., B.Ed., M. Music</td>
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<td>Years of teaching experience</td>
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TABLE 3.10: Participants in project at School 8

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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Position</td>
<td>Head of Department</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic qualifications</td>
<td>B.Sc.(Hons) B.Ed.</td>
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<td>Years of teaching experience</td>
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TABLE 3.11: Participants in project at School 9

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<th>2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Position</td>
<td>Head of Department (Acting as Deputy Principal)</td>
<td>Post Level 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic qualifications</td>
<td>B.A., B.Ed., M.Ed.</td>
<td>B.A. ACE (Life Orientation) B.Ed. (Hons)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Years of teaching experience</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.4.2 Data collection methods

As stated earlier, this research investigation has been approached from an interpretive perspective. Henning (2004:20) notes that interpretive investigators promote the use of numerous data sources, as they believe that diverse standpoints “construct the world” by means of several methods of observation, implying that numerous, imperfect views are better than fewer, rigid views (Henning, 2004:20). For this reason, I decided to employ different methods of data collection, namely observation, field notes, interviews and document or content analysis.

3.4.2.1 Observation

Maree (2007:83) defines observation as the orderly and coherent writing down of the format of actions and events of participants, with no need for communication with
respondents. The interpretative investigator seeks to understand the meaning of the actions of the respondents.

The investigator or researcher writes down what is observed in order to use the information to interpret the meaning of the participants' actions and speech. The data is in fact "observed twice" (Henning, 2004:82). The data is firstly interpreted in the natural setting as it was “presented”, and then the investigator interprets the data for the second time from the notes taken down from the observations (Henning, 2004:82). This skill or art of interpreting text is often called “hermeneutics” (Henning, 2004:82). The investigator then becomes a writer and puts forward the final copy to the reader of the content, who will now make an interpretation of the already twice interpreted content (Henning, 2004:82).

Observation entails jotting down notes, making comments, exploring situations, actions as well as making notes of the particular circumstances in which the actions have taken place. The recording of the actions and occurrences should be explained comprehensively (Best & Kahn, 2003:254).

Observation enables the investigator or researcher to recognise what is occurring instead of what the investigator may think what is occurring. The purpose of observation in a research study is to collect data on a particular topic (Basit, 2010:118-119). There are several advantages to using observation, for example, when respondents are not available to be interviewed or are incapable of completing questionnaires, or as an additional method to collect data (Basit, 2010). The investigator has to be present in the setting or go to the location to “see and hear” events as they unfold, jotting down notes (Basit, 2020:120). This data collection method is also popular when conducting action research. Data is collected first-hand by the researcher. There is no need to depend on respondents to give their own views about events or about their own actions (Basit, 2010:120). Henning (2004:81) claims that what is noticed through seeing and hearing, is in actual fact the investigator’s side or story of what is there.
According to Maree (2007:485), the different kinds of observation that can be employed in qualitative research, are complete observer, observer as participant, participant as observer, and complete participant. I decided to become an observer as participant. Maree (2007:485) maintains that the investigator succeeds in becoming involved in the process, but focuses on observing the process. To some extent, I was also a participant observer, because I was present to hear the perspectives of the school leaders on the project. I was also a non-participant observer, which means that I simply observed by monitoring, listening and recording (Gomm, 2008:12). These observations took place twice a month at the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University. The duration of each of these meetings or sessions was two hours. During these meetings, the participants in the project shared their experiences, while I listened and also recorded.

3.4.2.2 **Field notes**

Field notes are comprehensive reports of one’s observations. They are taken down by the research investigator as the phenomenon transpires and are apt to be the main data gathering instrument throughout the observation (Lankshear & Knobel, 2004:229). Essential features of field notes, according to Lankshear and Knobel (2004:229), are:

- Writing should be easy to read, as the research investigator must be able to read them even a while after the notes were first taken down.
- Making use of shorthand will assist in facilitating the logging of events.
- Notes must be jotted down in such a manner that there will be no hesitancy in handing over the notes should the participants of the research investigation request to see them.
- Codes such as pseudonyms or the initials of participants’ names must be used in order to protect their identity.

Lankshear and Knobel (2004:229) suggest that field notes must be written up comprehensively immediately after observations. They state that detailed field notes are useful when reaching the data analysis stage in the research, as they can be printed.
They are also tangible and can be cut up during this stage (Lankshear & Knobel, 2004:230).

Twice a month, the school leaders attended meetings at the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University. I observed all these sessions, where I was able to listen and watch and write down field notes of my observations. I was guided by my research questions in deciding what was important to record, focusing mainly on the challenges facing the participants in implementing their action research (AR) project and how they had responded to such challenges.

3.4.2.3 Interviews

Basit (2010:99-100) states that interviews are regarded as the most widespread method of collecting data, using an interpretive paradigm in a qualitative inquiry. An interview is described by some investigators as an exchange of opinions between two or more individuals on a subject of common interest (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003:94), conducted by one person who wishes to obtain “information” from the other person. The purpose of using interviews as a data gathering method is not to make generalisations, but to allow the investigator to explore the perceptions and experiences of the interviewee (Basit, 2010:100). Some qualitative investigators use interviews as the main data collection technique; others may use interviews while simultaneously using other techniques, such as observation (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003:95). The objective here is to collect detailed data in the exact words of the participant, to allow the investigator to generate an appreciation of the respondents’ interpretation of “some piece of the world” (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003:95).

Investigators could employ different types of interviews, namely structured interviews, semi-structured interviews and unstructured interviews. I used structured interviews in this study. A brief description of the structured interview is provided below.
Structured interview

A structured interview can be described as one in which a range of questions is prepared in advance by the investigator. The same questions are put to all the respondents, and the investigator does not deviate from the predetermined question and fixed procedures (Lodico et al., 2010:124).

Basit (2010:101) suggests that interviews offer the following advantages:

- Investigators have the chance to build a close relationship with the respondents, based on the trust established between them.
- When trust has been established, the participants will be inspired to answer the questions with greater sincerity and honesty.
- The bond that has been established between the investigator and participants, assists in retaining the participants’ enthusiasm and interest in the project and interview.

Bell (2005:157) expresses a similar view to Basit (2010), stating that one of the prime benefits of using interviews is their versatility and flexibility. The advantages or benefits of interviews have been contrasted with questionnaires by Bell (2005:157). A research investigator with the necessary skills can dig into the thoughts of interviewees, scrutinise answers and examine opinions and emotions, which is impossible when using questionnaires. Answers to questions can yield facts that written answers in a questionnaire would obscure. Bell (2005:157) further notes that interviews can bring about rich data and can, in her words, “put flesh on the bones” of the written responses on a questionnaire.

According to Basit (2010:101), conducting interviews takes time, and the data analysis process could be even more time-consuming. It would therefore only be possible to interview a fairly small number of individuals (Bell, 2005:157). Interviews can also be pricy in terms of travel costs. Transcribing the interviews can also be costly and time-
consuming. Best and Kahn (2003:325) emphasise that interviewing requires an experienced investigator who has the necessary skills and expertise, characteristics that novice or even inexperienced investigators lack (Best & Kahn, 2003:325). For this reason, I chose to conduct structured interviews, since they provide more guidance for the interviewer than unstructured ones. I selected interviews for this study, since I needed to explore in more depth the participants’ experiences of the action research process to triangulate this data analysis with the analysis of my observations.

According to Henning (2004:75), an interview may commence with a “scene-setting”, in which the purpose of the interview is explained. This I did by means of a short information session, during which I explained why the interview was being conducted and why it was significant to my study. I also attempted to explain briefly to the school leaders, the procedure to be followed. For example, I would refer to the qualitative questionnaire, to inform the interviewees (the school leaders), that the same questions would be asked. These interviews were audiotaped (I used a transcriber to transcribe the interviews verbatim).

3.4.2.4 Participant reports

In this study, the participants of each school wrote a report (see Appendix E). The purpose of writing this report was for research purposes, but also for educators at other schools and their peers to become aware of how challenges can be addressed by using action research. It was also compiled to enable educators in other countries to become aware of what educators are dealing with in their schools in South Africa. In addition, the purpose was to share the learning and experiences of the participating school leaders with their communities, parents and other audiences in terms of their challenges and successes by giving evidence of their improvements and by raising awareness of action research in particular. A seminar or a conference was held at the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University where the participants presented their projects.
3.5 DATA ANALYSIS

Data analysis is described by Lankshear and Knobel (2004:266) as a way of classifying segments of data in order to determine major themes or connections with regard to convictions or notions and then making sense of the data. In anticipation of scrutiny, the data has to be prepared properly (Lankshear & Knobel, 2004:266). For example, getting spoken data ready for evaluation generally entails converting it into words (Lankshear & Knobel, 2004:266) – a process referred to as transcription – before analysing it thematically. Gibson and Brown (2009:127) claim that data is analysed according to links, association or variations. They maintain that there is no fixed method or strategy to use in “thematic work”, but literature provides useful notions on how to embark on analysing data when doing a qualitative inquiry or investigation (Gibson & Brown, 2009:127). Gibson and Brown (2009:128) further state that a critical element of “thematic analysis” is to first examine the data, in search of general themes or topics. These general topics can then be examined and further subdivided (Gibson & Brown, 2009:128). Secondly, the purpose of thematic analysis is to examine the data in search of variations. Research investigators look for uniformity as well as for elements that appear to be exclusive. Their aim is to examine the data in search of any disparities and unique features. They also need to determine whether the data is pertinent to the particular topic being researched (Gibson and Brown, 2009:128). Lastly, research investigators/inquirers scrutinise the data in pursuit of relations between the various facets of their exploration. This may imply trying to find “ways” in which various code groupings link respectively (Gibson and Brown, 2009:129). It may also necessitate looking at how particular unique “characteristics” or variances link up with the common topics (Gibson and Brown, 2009:129).

Henning (2004:127) maintains that data analysis in qualitative research is continuous, emerging and repetitive. Lodico et al. (2010:35) concur with the view that the research investigator examines the collected data systematically during the investigation. A data analysis technique usually incorporates the coding of the data. Coding entails the
scrutiny of the data, trying to find the “patterns, themes or categories” that appear from the data.

According to Somekh and Lewin (2005:338), data analysis in qualitative research is a two-step process consisting of the following:

- Making notes in a notebook, keeping record of important points that need to be remembered.
- Dividing or breaking up the data and assigning a label to the pieces of data as the initial step in seeking answers to the research questions.

The researcher has to read through every line of the transcribed data and then sort the data into significant parts or segments. When he/she discovers significant parts, the researcher now has to assign codes to the data. Maree (2007:105) describes “coding” as a method that entails designating certain symbols, expressive words or special identifiable names to significant parts of data. Miles and Huberman (1994:56), as cited by Bell (2005:214), state that a code implies that a “tag or label” is used to give “meaning” to the collected data. Bell states that codes are assigned to what she refers to as “chunks” of data that vary in size, which means that a “chunk” can be a word, phrase, sentence or a paragraph that either relates or is irrelevant to a particular “setting” (Miles & Huberman (1994) in Bell (2005:214)). Codes are useful in “retrieving” and managing the different segments. These segments need to be categorised, because what is extremely important, is what these segments actually mean (Bell, 2005:214).

Best and Kahn (2003:258) point out that the researcher has to deal with huge volumes of data, tries to decrease the data, then has to determine “patterns” in order to develop a basic plan for transmitting the significance of what appears from the data (Best & Kahn, 2003:258). In their view, data analysis in qualitative research consists of three steps, as presented below.
Firstly, data analysis entails “organising the data”, since qualitative research generates massive amounts of data gathered from the different techniques, such as field notes and observations, as well as interviews. In their view, there is no fixed strategy, as organisation of the data will vary, because different researchers will have different approaches. For example, the data collected from interviews may be organised according to the individual responses or, in the case of structured interviews, the responses could be grouped together. The researcher should also determine variations, as well as similarities (Best & Kahn, 2003:259).

The second step in the data analysis process is “describing” the data. The means that the research investigator will now explain relevant features of the research study, which would include aspects relating to the locale and the individual participants, as well as the opinions of the participants (Best & Kahn, 2003:259).

Best and Kahn (2003:259) state that the last step in the data analysis process is the “interpretation” of the data. In their opinion, “interpretation” entails making the results clear, providing responses to the “why” questions, assigning meaning to specific outcomes, and designing an orderly structure (Best & Kahn, 2003:259). Sometimes, research investigators are inclined to hastily interpret the data, instead of tackling the more challenging part of the process, namely to give logical answers to the detailed research questions. The accuracy of qualitative data analysis relies on offering sound, expressive material in such a manner that other audiences will gain insight and make their own inferences when reading the material (Best & Kahn, 2003:259).

I used the three steps outlined above to code the data in this study. All my field notes, the transcribed interviews and the participants’ reports were analysed to determine specific themes that related to the research questions (Best & Kahn, 2003:259).
3.6 MEASURES TO ENSURE TRUSTWORTHINESS

The main rule of sound qualitative research, according to Lincoln and Guba (1985) in Babbie and Mouton (2001:277), appears to be the idea of trustworthiness. They imply that trustworthiness refers to the impartiality and objectivity of the research results. In their view, the fundamental point about trustworthiness is straightforward: How can an investigator convince other observers, including him- or herself, that the results of a research investigation will be desirable to read and analyse? (Babbie & Mouton, 2001:277).

In a qualitative research investigation, trustworthiness can be achieved by data that is rich and comprehensive; by truthfulness; and by using triangulation (Basit, 2010:67). Lincoln and Guba (1985), as cited by Mills (2007:85), on the other hand, indicate that a research investigation can be confirmed by dealing with the credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability of the study.

3.6.1 Credibility

According to Mills (2007:85), the credibility of a study refers to the capacity of the investigator to consider the difficulties that are present in an investigation and to grapple with themes or categories that are not easy to describe. Mills (2007:85) suggests that the investigator should be involved over an extended period of time at the location of the study, should carry out continuous observation to discern universal qualities, and should also carry out triangulation. According to Bogdan and Biklen (2003:107), triangulation was first adopted in the social sciences, to impart the notion that to verify information, a variety of data sources are required. When triangulation was first used in qualitative investigations, it implied the verification of information. This meant that numerous data sources resulted in gaining a better understanding of the events that were being investigated (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003:107). Some research investigators are in favour of triangulation, because they feel that depending on one method only may lead to
prejudice or an inaccurate opinion about a certain part of the research investigation on the part of the investigator (Basit, 2010:67).

Research investigators may use the following procedures to diminish the degree to which their own standpoints may encroach or infringe. They may also examine and note the following qualities of the research procedures to confirm that these procedures have indeed been thorough and meticulous (Stringer, 2004:57).

“Prolonged Engagement”: An investigation that is thorough necessitates that investigators spend plenty of time at the setting in order to become enlightened and knowledgeable with regard to the “context” (Stringer, 2004:57). I also triangulated by means of multiple sources of data collection and use of independent recoders of data. Credibility was enhanced in this study through the methods described below.

Engagement with the respondents over an extended period of time provides evidence of a scrupulous research investigation. In this study, a conscious effort was made to spend time with school leaders, especially in areas not known to the researcher. Appointments were made with some school leaders, just to become familiar and known. At some of the schools, the school leaders took me around the school premises to show their classrooms and playgrounds, so that I could get first-hand information regarding the context of these schools.

3.6.2 Transferability

By transferability, Mills (2007:86) refers to the requirement that qualitative investigations be sensitive to their context and that comprehensive explanations of the context be provided so that the investigations can offer to make critique within different contexts feasible.

In quantitative research, there appears to be the belief that results must be generalised. In qualitative research, the results of an investigation will not be generalised, but will be
applicable only to the background and circumstances of a particular study. Qualitative researchers, however, try to yield the probability that the outcomes may be transferable to other contexts, so that people may benefit from the wisdom gained during the research investigation. The possibility that the results may be applicable, can be analysed in terms of the prospect that another situation would be very similar for the results to be pertinent (Stringer, 2004:59). Qualitative researchers strive to give in-depth descriptions or accounts of the “context” of the study, as well as of the participants, so that other individuals can evaluate if the investigation can be applied to their own context. However, the fact that thick and rich descriptions are generally used in qualitative research, illustrates the significance of the trustworthiness of a study. Others are thus permitted to gain an appreciation of the circumstances and individuals involved in the research investigation (Stringer, 2004:59).

Transferability alludes to the degree to which the results can be administered to other participants or different/distinct “contexts” (Babbie & Mouton, 2001:277). All observations are specified by the particular contexts in which they transpire. The qualitative investigator contends that learning secured from a particular context will not automatically be related to different contexts, or even similar contexts, at some other time. When conducting quantitative research, the investigator is obliged to see to it that the results can be generalised to a larger population. In qualitative research, transferability is demonstrated by other observers reading the “study” (Babbie & Mouton, 2001:277). Quantitative researchers frequently use random sampling, but qualitative investigators use purposive sampling. They are indicating that they strive to select samples that will provide the exact information, as well as samples that could provide the greatest amount of information about the participants and about their contexts (Babbie & Mouton, 2001:277).

In this study, the contexts of the schools who participated in the action research project, were described in full. Complete details of all the respondents of this study were also provided to permit other scholars to make an assessment in terms of applying the results of this study to their own situations. In this manner, other scholars may gain
awareness of the circumstances surrounding the research investigation and the respondents. To ensure transferability, purposive sampling was deployed by selecting samples that would produce the greatest volume of information about the respondents and their unique circumstances.

3.6.3 Dependability

The “stability” of research information is referred to as dependability (Mills, 2007:86). Dependability can be dealt with, as pointed out by Mills (2007:86), by using more than one method so that the weak points of the one method are neutralised by the strong points of another. Mills (2007:86) further suggests that an “audit trail” should be initiated, which implies that an outside auditor could be used to scrutinise the data collection methods and interpretation.

The trustworthiness of a study rests on the degree to which other audiences are enabled to determine if the research processes are appropriate for the objectives of the study, in Stringer’s view (2004:59). The dependability of a research investigation can be obtained through an “inquiry audit”, which means that aspects of the entire research procedure are made accessible to both participants and other observers. Certain aspects, such as the formulation of the research questions and the gathering and analysis of data, are examples of particulars regarding the research process that are procurable (Stringer, 2004:59).

Particulars of the full research investigation are made available to other scholars and also by using “the inquiry audit”. For this purpose, complete information regarding the total investigation procedures is at the disposal of other audiences as well as to respondents. The issue of dependability in this study was addressed by utilising various data gathering methods, as mentioned by Mills (2007:86). During my visits to the schools, especially for the interviews, the participants were invited to examine my field notes as well as the transcriptions of the interviews.
The last principle for confirming the trustworthiness of a research investigation is confirmability.

### 3.6.4 Confirmability

Mills (2007:86-87) defines confirmability as the fairness or impartiality of the data. Confirmability can be achieved, according to Mills (2007:86-87), by carrying out triangulation, in terms of which numerous data sources and numerous methods are contrasted with one another to cross-examine the information. Deliberately disclosing essential inferences or prejudices that lead to certain questions and results to be put forward in a certain way, is another method of addressing confirmability (Mills, 2007:86-87).

The research investigator may keep notes of data, which should be accessible to other audiences for scrutiny. The notes comprise what Stringer (2004:60) refers to “raw data” such as field notes, data with comments, copies of letters and any facts or information produced at meetings. Any programmes, “reports”, reduction and analysis of data are also incorporated (Stringer, 2004:60). Other audiences and participants are empowered to authenticate that the research investigation correctly and appropriately epitomises the frame of reference of the study (Stringer, 2004:60).

Lincoln and Guba (1985) in Babbie and Mouton (2001:278) describe confirmability as the extent to which the results of a research investigation are the fruit of the emphasis of the research investigation and not of the prejudices of the inquirer or investigator. By using the methods described above, the “trustworthiness” of the research investigation is improved (Stringer, 2004:60).

The confirmability of this research investigation was ensured by producing the following information to other scholars and even the respondents for scrutiny: The investigator’s rough notes, taken during each meeting with the respondents, as well as the rough notes made during and after some of the interviews were made available for
examination. The final reports of the various schools were also placed at the disposal of other audiences (see Annexure E).

Research investigators may use ethical considerations to diminish the degree to which their own standpoints may encroach or infringe. They may also examine and note the following qualities of the research procedure to confirm that these procedures have indeed been thorough and meticulous (Stringer, 2004:57).

3.7 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Ethics relates to seeking to devise rules and moral principles of behavior. Ethics may thus be described as looking for codes of behavior that allow us to do our work under certain conditions in a logical and rational manner when conducting our research investigations (Basit, 2010:56).

As investigators, we need to be considerate of the respondents, by conducting our investigations with empathy and understanding, protecting the self-worth of the respondents and looking after them, not only throughout the research investigation, but also after its completion (Basit, 2010:56). Lodico et al. (2010:18) view informed consent and confidentiality as major issues that relate to ethics.

Informed consent implies that the respondents have been given direction about the investigation methods, that their involvement is discretionary, and that they are entitled to pull out of the research investigation at any time without any consequences.

Somekh and Lewin (2005:57) note that confidentiality as an ethical principle permits individuals the right to express their opinions in confidence, but that they also have the right to decline the publishing of information that may be harmful to them.

Anonymity is a method through which the privacy of respondents is protected. Pseudonyms may be used to protect the identity of either individuals or institutions such
as schools (Somekh & Lewin, 2005:57). Anonymity is appropriate in situations where the individual’s identity needs to be protected, but does not give any assurance that he or she may be safe from harm or hurt. Responses to research investigation “reports” cannot be predicted in advance. Somekh and Lewin (2005:57) state that the context may uncover information on the identification of individuals even when pseudonyms for the names of places and individuals are used. In some forms of research, such as action research, “anonymisation” is unsuitable or incongruous when the respondents are investigating or studying their own profession or work, such as a school. In these circumstances, identifying individuals is significant in giving recognition to their contribution to engendering “knowledge” (Somekh & Lewin, 2005:57).

In Bailey’s (1978) description of harm, as cited by Kumar (2005:214), aspects in social research, such as uneasiness, tension, victimisation or coercion, intruding on a person’s freedom of interference or humiliating processes, are incorporated. The research investigator needs to be wary when gathering information from participants not to cause them pain or injury. If the participants are suffering from anxiety or coercion during any stage of obtaining information from them, the onus is on the research investigator to curb such activities. When conducting a research investigation, the researcher should be aware of the fact that there is always the possibility of harming certain individuals in some way (Babbie & Mouton, 2001:522). Babbie and Mouton (2001:522) declare that under no circumstances can the research investigator guard against all these potential harms to the participants. The participants engaged voluntarily in this project. I received approval from the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University that I conducted my study in an ethical manner (see Annexure A).

3.8 LITERATURE CONTROL

A literature study is orchestrated to provide a justification for the research investigation, according to Creswell (2005) in Erasmus (2009:75). In this research study, literature control functioned to connect the present research findings to earlier research and therefore establishes the contribution as well as the importance of the research
investigation, in Byrne’s (1997) view, as cited by Erasmus (2009:75). The purpose of this research study was to create awareness among all educators, especially school leaders, not only of action research, but also to inspire and give them hope that it could be an extremely useful tool in grappling with practically most of their daily challenges in search of resolutions.

3.9 LIMITATIONS OF STUDY

This study was a qualitative study, and therefore the size of the sample was small. Nine schools in formerly disadvantaged communities participated in the action research project. I could therefore only approach these schools for interviews. Only six schools were available for the interviews. They also completed the qualitative questionnaire. Three of the participating schools were not available for the interviews, but were willing to complete the questionnaire. The information gathered in this research study was therefore limited to certain individuals in participating schools and should not be generalised to all South African schools. The study sample was confined to schools in the Northern Areas and the townships of Nelson Mandela Bay.

3.10 CONCLUSIONS

In this chapter, I explained the research design, paradigm and methodology. The data collection methods employed in this research investigation were also outlined. The advantages and disadvantages of some data collection methods were also presented. Ethical considerations and trustworthiness were discussed in the context of this study. The chapter concluded with a brief description of the limitations of the research investigation.

In Chapter Four, the action research process, as implemented by the school leaders, will be presented and the principles underlining action research as a means for school improvement will be discussed.
CHAPTER FOUR

THEORETICAL EXPLICATION OF ACTION RESEARCH PROCESS

4.1 INTRODUCTION

In Chapter Three, the research design and methodology of the study was discussed. In this chapter, the action research process, as followed by the participating school leaders, will be explained theoretically. Justification for the use of action research as well as action research in education will be provided. The types and principles of action research will be explained, followed by the process.

Firstly, it is required of me to refer briefly to the purpose of this research study, which was to explore how school leaders could be assisted in addressing issues that impact negatively on the functioning of their schools, by adopting an action research process (refer to Section 1.4). A theoretical explanation will now be provided as justification for my choice of action research as a means of improving school leadership as well as school functioning.

4.2 ACTION RESEARCH IN EDUCATION

Educators from many countries, such as the United Kingdom, the United States, Australia, New Zealand and Vietnam, have used action research to study their practices, according to Grudens-Schuck (2004:6) and Hien (2009:97).

Kemmis and McTaggart (1988), cited by McNiff (2002:24), describe action research as a collective activity of self-reflection by participants to improve their logic and legitimacy, as well as their understanding of their practices and the conditions in which these practices are performed. They also observe that this entails presenting problems as well as finding solutions to such problems. The action research process prioritises the
enhancement of practice. Its aim is to take action to improve a particular situation or practice (Craig, 2009:4). Elliott (1991) concurs with Craig (2009) that the primary objective for carrying out action research is the improvement of practice. For the last three decades, action research has been used as an educational improvement process that calls for collaboration, discussion, exploration, reflection and leadership (Lambert (1998), as cited in Peters (2004:536)). It is also commonly described as a process of self-reflection in terms of a recurring cycle of planning, acting, observing and reflecting (Bruce & Pine, 2010:37; Schmuck, 2009:32; Elliott, 1991:69; Oja and Smulyan, 1989:17; Kemmis and McTaggart, 1988:10; McNiff, 1988:7) on the methods and effects that result in re-planning (Kemmis & Wilkinson (1998:20), cited by Patrick, McCormack & Reynolds (2007:4). It is “participatory” (Craig, 2009:4; Pine, 2009:53; Grudens-Schuck, 2004:6; Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988:22;) in that the research participants are considered equal partners in the process, since they possess expert knowledge about the phenomenon under investigation (Craig, 2009:4). According to Craig (2009:5), action research is both proactive and reactive. The research process is proactive when the investigator working in the environment discerns possible issues and then undertakes research in order to help the participants enhance the situation. The research process is reactive when the investigator recognises any issue that is already there, and then undertakes research among the participants to rectify and enhance the situation (Craig, 2009:5). A reactive approach has been adopted in this study, because the participating school leaders were facilitated to identify an issue that was already present at their schools; therefore the main focus was on the action research process that they implemented, and not on identifying the issue.

4.2.1 Types of action research

There are many different types of action research, but for the purpose of this study, I adopted a participatory action research (PAR) approach (Bruce & Pine, 2010:18; Brown & Rodriguez, 2009:23; Gordon, 2008) and collaborative action research (CAR) approach (Bruce & Pine, 2010:17; Gordon, 2008). Participatory action research refers to the engagement of the participants in all stages of the research process (Babbie &
Mouton, 2001:61). Newton and Burgess (2008:21) state that there are three modes of action research: technical/scientific/collaborative, practical/mutual collaborative and the emancipating/enhancing/critical science mode. In their view, the emancipating mode can help educators gain a better understanding of the basic problem by raising mutual awareness. A collaborative, participative approach has been employed in this study to work with the school leaders to improve their situations. It is therefore important to present an explanation of collaborative action research, as presented below.

4.2.2 Collaborative action research

Collaborative action research is a form of research in terms of which educators, with their school leaders, can come together with the personnel of a university, with the aim of enhancing practice, play a part in educational knowledge, and as a form of staff development (Schmuck, 2009:64; Oja & Smulyan, 1989:24). This type of research is carried out in teams (Schmuck, 2009:64; Oja & Smulyan, 1989:24). In this manner, partnerships are established, which is characterised by mutual support, which results in mutual advantages (Schmuck, 2009:65). In this manner, educator isolation is reduced, as collaborative action research demands that educators become involved with critical dialogue and debates about their practices or workplaces (Hobson (2001), cited by Bruce & Pine (2010:17). Pine (2009:128) describes collaborative action research as:

“Collaborative action research liberates teachers’ creative potential, stimulates their abilities to investigate their own situations, and mobilises human resources to solve educational problems.”

Collaborative action research prioritises the development of cultures of inquiry with various stakeholders in communities of learning (Friedman (2001), cited by Mitchell et al. (2009:345)). The essence of collaborative action research between university partners and novice or experienced educators is a commitment to educational advancement (McNiff (2002), cited by Mitchell et al. (2009:345)).
The necessity for academics or research investigators and educators to work collaboratively on issues that they share in common, has been accentuated by Corey (1953), cited by Oja and Smulyan (1989:4). This collaboration between educators and academics is required to increase their commitment to transformation, if the research study illustrated that transformation was necessary. As collaborative action research requires that educators work in teams or groups, a team could be a source of support to participants to experiment and take risks, without being compelled to participate. Educators could assume the role of experimenter, instead of being the object of the experiment. These teams produce a wide variety of ideas, beliefs, insights and skills that could be relied upon and that increased the anticipation that the research study could be feasible (Oja & Smulyan, 1989:5).

Pine (2009:111), however, indicates that collaborative action research is a process that is distinguished by the following aspects: Academics from a university and the educators describe their research issues jointly. Critical reflection and critical discussions or talks form part of the process, as the participants search for solutions. In this process, learning and growth takes place for both parties, which will enable the educators to improve their problem-solving skills, as well as enhance their personal and professional growth. This is in line with the statement made by Pine (2009:111) that “action research is professional development”.

The aims of collaborative action research in education is to form groups of individuals who are committed to consciously transform themselves, and by these transformations, believe that they can transform their educational efforts (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988:44). This process, according to Kemmis and McTaggart (1988:44), is about facilitating individuals to become aware and critical about their actions – enabling them to contribute towards educational improvement through their collaborations. Calhoun (1992) in Gordon (2008:138), however, holds that the aims of collaborative action research are to diminish educator isolation, to make contributions to the knowledge base, and to give a voice to all stakeholders. These aims illustrate that collaborative action research appears to be most appropriate in schools in post-apartheid South
Africa today. During apartheid, stakeholders in education, namely educators, parents and communities, had no voice and had to implement what the authorities wanted. In collaborative action research, parents and educators are presented with opportunities to work jointly on the improvement of education in schools.

I would like to distinguish between collaborative action research (CAR) and participatory action research (PAR), since this study was also informed by a participatory approach. Participatory action research is described as a practical approach in which the participants become co-researchers of a problem that has a direct impact on them, seeking a solution to address this problem (Brown & Rodriguez, 2009:23; Hendricks, 2009, cited by Bruce & Pine, 2010:18; McNiff, 1988:4). Participatory action research is described by some scholars, such as Pine (2009:53), as a “social participatory process” in which participants are engaged in studying their real world in order to transform it. Stringer (2007:11) in Pine (2009:53) further describes participatory action research as being democratic, as all participants take part and that it is also equitable, recognising that people or individuals are regarded as equal.

Teams were established in this study as the project leader, a professor from the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University and outside experts, such as mentors, worked in collaboration with school leaders on this project, as demanded by this form of research. Each team had to negotiate and debate a project that could be addressed and researched by this team. This is where the participatory element was applied in my study. As the educators were now studying issues of communal concern in their own schools, they became part of the enquiry (McNiff, 1988:4) and they were thus not only being researched, but were also researching.

Action research may be employed for various reasons. Action research can be used when the school’s emphasis is not only on improvement, but also on improving the strategies, which are possible by developing a shared purpose and a shared topic that could be improved (Sagor, 2000:7). Some scholars, such as Clausen, Aquino and Wideman (2009:445), Sagor (2000:7) and Schmuck (2009:99), state that action
research can be used to change schools into learning communities in which groups of educators with a shared interest can study their domain of interest, which is then shared with the entire community.

Ferrance (2000:27) notes that the reasons for using action research can be classified into three groups: firstly, to improve personal and professional development of educators (Oja & Smulyan, 1989:81; McNiff, 1988:9); secondly, to advance practice (McNiff & Whitehead, 2010:18; Sagor, 2000:7) in order to improve student learning; and thirdly to enhance the teaching profession (Johnson, 1995). Basit (2010:24) states that the aim of action research is not simply to enhance practice, but to improve educators’ self-confidence and to deepen their standpoints and appreciation of problematic issues pertaining to their practice. This could result in changed attitudes, principles and beliefs. I decided on action research as a methodology to make school leaders aware of this type of research and how it could be used to tackle problematic issues, to improve their schools. Another reason for choosing action research, was to improve the self-confidence of school leaders as they are studying their own schools. I was strongly influenced in this study by the following statement of Lewin (1948:203), cited by Oja and Smulyan (1989:2): “Research that produces nothing but books will not suffice”. I was motivated to undertake action research, through which I could attempt to make an immediate impact and could therefore also witness immediate results. I felt strongly that I would not undertake the research merely for the sake of research; I did not want to add to the volumes of books, since I intensely desired that practitioners in the educational field should benefit from my research. Action research means the application of strategies to address immediate problems, with the aim of improving the functioning of schools (Oja & Smulyan, 1989:1).

The reflective rationality of action research suggests that complicated practical issues require particular solutions. The context in which the problems originated, is crucial to developing solutions (Parker, 2006). Hien (2009:99) concurs with Parker (2006), namely that action research is context-specific. The solutions can be used by others as hypotheses that have to be tested, as they cannot be employed in a different context
It was clear from my interactions with the participating school leaders that in searching for solutions to their many problems, taking cognisance of the context of their schools was pivotal, as action research is always linked to a specific context.

4.3 ACTION RESEARCH AS A TOOL FOR EDUCATIONAL IMPROVEMENT

There is much evidence in literature that attests to the usefulness of action research in encouraging and promoting improved school functioning. Calhoun (2002) regards action research as a method that was developed to impart and enhance educational practices in schools (Gordon, 2008:106). It is a medium in which one’s practice can be scrutinised in its “context”, to relook one’s situation, to make plans according to what is needed to improve the situation, and to make an assessment of the outcomes (Gordon, 2008:106). Decision-making about education is based on precise or meticulous information, as action research encompasses the gathering and scrutiny of data. Action research is ongoing and revolves around cycles, thus supporting the development of a culture of continual inquiry in schools (Gordon, 2008:106; McNiff & Whitehead, 2010:39). Calhoun refers to this as a useful instrument to transform and ameliorate all types of schools (Gordon, 2008:106). In Mills’ (2007:v) view, action research has the capacity to be an important change agent in education. He refers to action research as a vehicle for dealing with difficult issues that educators experience daily, as an instrument for examining taken-for-granted beliefs, as well as a means to be confident and optimistic about the future (Mills, 2007:v). Action research has even been used in special education to address issues such as literacy, inclusion and the identification of children with disabilities in India (Sen & Goldbart (2005) cited by Bruce & Pine (2010:21)). Action research is informed by a critical paradigm.

Critical paradigm underpinning action research

The aim of critical theory is to come to an awareness of the different insights into current power relations, which are the root of social practice, by dismantling the assumptions, standards and values, according to Kriel (1993) (in Davidoff, Julie, Meerkotter &

Critical reflection appears to be an essential condition for emancipatory action research. It implies a “constant checking of our interpretations and understanding”. Knowledge in itself is not static; it changes, is unpredictable and contains the risk of error (Walker, 1993:101). The three modes of action research are the technical, practical and the emancipatory modes, according to Habermas (1972), cited by Walker (1993) in Davidoff et al. (1993:104).

The technical mode emphasises the following of rules and control, as it promotes “efficient and effective practices” instead of developing educators’ understanding of their practices. This mode increases technical rationality: educators and learners are viewed as “instruments of change and the nature of this change”. The practical mode highlights greater understanding of the self to enable decisions to be made about change in the interests of learners (Walker (1993:105) in Davidoff et al., 1993:105). The emancipatory mode advances a critical awareness, demonstrated in political as well as practical actions, to bring or advance change. The whole intention of critical theory is to revoke any measures that are oppressive and replace these with measures that individuals can relate to that are also more satisfying (Davidoff et al., 1993:91). The critical paradigm is required in leadership, as school leaders should embrace an ethos of questioning in their schools, as the undemocratic practices that prevailed for so many years can no longer be tolerated. The statement with regard to school leadership by McNiff (1988:7) is most applicable:

“It is this conjoint experiencing, this mutually supportive dialogue, that is the action of research that brings people together as explorers of their own destiny, rather than alienates them as operators and puppets.”
Reason (2004) in Gordon (2008:4) refers to action research as being “dynamic”, because action research is a repetitive process of taking action and reflecting; it is a process that changes and grows over time (Gordon, 2008:4). Reflection takes place at each phase of the “problem-solving process”; problem-solving is thus enhanced. Winter (1989:14) describes action research as having no final answers, because every step is a step forward. Reflecting on one’s work is viewed as an opportunity to learn and grow (Gordon, 2008:4; McNiff, 2002:19), which can also contribute to professional development (Gordon, 2008:xii). This reflection means giving consideration to one’s relationships with other individuals and whether those individuals were advantaged. McNiff (2002:19) makes the strong statement that these interactions may have a changing effect on their lives; even if the impact is small, it could potentially be life-affirming.

In this study, school leaders were encouraged to reflect on their problems and actions as well as on the entire action research process, which advanced their problem-solving skills. Through the action research process, the school leaders became conscious of their own practices and approaches as leaders in rethinking these practices in their schools. By following a process of action research, school leaders were forced to constantly assess the situation and change their actions. It is essential that school leaders become “reflective practitioners”, as they need to reflect on their leadership practices. This improves their decision-making skills and fosters a culture of continual school improvement.

One or a few critical friends may be asked to become part of the research in any action research project. These critical friends are there to give advice and to critique as they become acquainted with the research process. It is important that they reveal actual or possible weak spots. They therefore play an important role in terms of providing different or new angles, because sometimes problematic issues are overlooked (McNiff, 2002:105). In this study, the group consisting of school leaders and mentors were honest and open when critiquing the strategies of school leaders. Action research entails being continuously open to the critique of others, as this will lead to growth in
understanding one’s practice. In this study, the critical friends identified and pointed out weak spots that needed further attention. In the following section, I will explain the principles of action research that relate to my study.

Action research, of the emancipatory, participative genre, is grounded in the principles examined below.

4.3.1 Principles of action research

Action research is based on certain non-negotiable principles and values that emanate from a critical paradigm and that have the improvement of the social good as their intent (McNiff & Whitehead, 2006). These will now be discussed below.

Democracy

According to Sales, Traver and Garcia (2011:2), action research embodies democratic processes, thereby creating space for individuals to voice their opinions, feelings and views. A research process that emphasises collaboration, inclusion, learning and transformation can therefore be constructed. The empowerment of educators and the school community can be achieved, because action research is powerful in deconstructing the notion that only academics can be researchers. It shows regard for the school as a learning constituent, and it favours collaboration between educators to ensure the formation of learning communities. It could therefore be used as an instrument for improving the potential of school communities (Sales et al., 2011:2).

By undertaking action research, the school leaders as participants in this project had the opportunity to learn more about themselves and also from one another. “Action research is about learning to improve learning in order to inform new thinking and new practices” (McNiff & Whitehead, 2010:104).
Action research was essentially political in the struggle for liberation during apartheid and prioritised matters relating to social justice (Somekh & Lewin, 2005:91). Since becoming citizens of a democratic state, South Africans have embraced approaches such as action research through which knowledge can be generated, produced and applied to improve their lives (Zuber-Skerritt, 1996). Even in the USA, action research is rooted in the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s, and was instrumental in events and activities that advanced social justice (Somekh & Lewin, 2005:91). The concept of social justice remains an important value on which action research is based (McNiff & Whitehead, 2006). In this study, the school leaders were encouraged by the project leader to democratically decide on what topic they wished to address, together with their colleagues at school.

Democracy as a value is extremely important to me, because education currently requires democratic leaders who involve all stakeholders in decision-making; it is also important, because hierarchies should be non-existent. In the past, school leaders functioned by carrying out instructions from the authorities, often practising the same approach toward their colleagues. School leaders who are democratic show respect for the abilities of others and will not exclude anybody in making vital decisions and in their planning, but will consult with their staff. Stringer (2004:33) refers to participation and democracy as "pick and shovel, bread and butter issues" that should be incorporated into the daily activities of school life (Stringer, 2004:33).

**Participation**

Action research is embedded in the notion of participation, which underpins its goals, practice and central values (Reason & Bradbury, 2008:8). In addition, Lodico et al (2010:317) contend that action research fosters the development of a community of learning or enquiry (Gordon, 2008) through collaboration and diminishing educator isolation. It also develops a scientific basis for enhancing schooling practices and results, securing transformation in teaching and learning practices. It also advances discussion and conversations between educators and researchers at universities, such
as in this case, resulting in the decentralisation of knowledge (Lodico et al., 2010:317). Reason and Bradbury (2008:8) state that it concerns “opening communicative spaces” for discussion, exploration and improvement of social conditions. The aforementioned authors state that as individuals we do not “experience the world in isolation” and that knowledge is a socially constructed phenomenon (McNiff & Whitehead, 2006). In this study, formal and informal team meetings took place on a regular basis between school leaders, a necessity when engaging with action research in order to facilitate any difficulties that may arise between team members. Team members are thus enabled to reach a better understanding of the reciprocal objectives and frames of reference.

There appear to be different definitions of the term “learning communities” in the literature. For example, Dewey (1938) uses the term ‘communities of inquiry”; Senge (1996; 1990) the term “learning organisation”; while Bereiter and Scardamalia (1993) refer to “knowledge-building communities”. Although different names for and variations of the term exist, “learning communities” appear to be the main concept, as it seems to be some common thread between the myriad of terms (Clausen et al. 2009:445). Graves (1992), cited by Clausen et al. (2009:445), defines a “learning community” as:

> “an inherently cooperative cohesive and self-reflective group entity whose members work … toward common goals while respecting a variety of perspectives, values and life-styles.”

Clausen et al. (2009:445) have identified several features of learning communities. For the purpose of my study, I give preference to the term “learning community” and will now explicate the features that I regard as being of significance to my study.

A shared goal or purpose is the driving force of a learning community: “Effective leadership” is required in a learning community to develop and communicate a vision that can be shared by everyone in the organisation (Clausen et al., 2009:445; Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009:50). In the educational field, some scholars state that a collective vision, using a bottom-up approach, should be developed, while others emphasise the
involvement of the whole staff in determining objectives and working collectively towards realising these. This means that it is absolutely necessary for school leaders to exercise leadership by taking the initiative. School leaders need to function as a stimulus – they must persuade educators to engage with the project, as a collective goal means nothing without a project. School leaders therefore need to lead the way by arranging meetings to bring educators together.

Hierarchies in terms of who knows more do not exist in true learning communities, as they call for the contribution of everyone, according to Kleine-Kracht (1993) in Clausen et al. (2009:447). This can be achieved only if the school leader is willing to establish collegiality with educators, share control or influence and decision-making, and encourage and support the development of leaders among educators who can delegate and accept responsibility (Clausen et al., 2009:445; Oya & Smulyan, 1989:17). A leader who is willing to share power, would be willing to work alongside the team, thereby allowing others to take the initiative. Demonstrating how to be a follower, can be very powerful in the success of collaborative action research. This could give rise to educators feeling empowered and will serve the good of the school community (Cooper & Boyd, 1995, cited by Clausen et al., 2009:447).

Flexibility and adaptability are important features in the daily, weekly and annual programmes of learning communities. Flexible time-tabling is important, to make provision for any unanticipated strains on educators caused by carrying out change (Cooper & Boyed 1994, cited by Clausen et al., 2009:447). The ability to be flexible and adaptable is significant, as participating school leaders indicated. In this study, very often, they were willing to adjust their daily programme by, for example, convening a staff meeting for the action research project and also to support those educators and school leaders who were willing to become involved.

Participation in a research investigation implies that we do not regard the people that we are working with as “subjects” with whom we interact only in order to gather data for our research purposes. As researchers, we need to form partnerships with our participants,
who must participate fully in the process of problem identification, investigation of solutions, choice and implementation of solutions, and in the evaluation of the success of their actions (Reason & Bradbury, 2008:9). Participation also has a political leaning, in that it upholds the rights and capabilities of individuals to have a say in decisions that affect them and where knowledge is engendered about them. This not only brings about the creation of knowledge (Brown & Rodriguez, 2009:23; Reason & Bradbury, 2008:9) and action that are valuable to individuals, but also results in empowerment (Reason & Bradbury, 2008:9).

Stringer (2004:41) agrees that action research is empowering, as it enables individuals to show their skills and expertise by participating in activities related to research. These individuals can now see that they are capable of generating and applying their own “knowledge” (Reason & Bradbury, 2008:9).

In this study, the school leaders worked together as a team so that learning could take place reciprocally. The teams, consisting of the school leaders of the various schools, created spaces in which they could actually socialise with each other. Learning took place and, through the sharing, the school leaders and their teams realised that many of the issues pursued by some of the school leaders, they had experienced themselves. In this way, the school leaders gained valuable knowledge of how to deal with similar issues. Action research has a political inclination which is illustrated by the engagement of school leaders in tackling problematic issues, interrogating those issues, and doing something to improve the situation.

A sense of community is impossible when individuals are coerced to comply simply because it is demanded by authority. Individuals then become doubtful, as distrust sets in, based on a lack of confidence in their schools as organisations (Stringer, 2004:34). The following principles form the foundation for the development of communities: a communicative spirit of honesty and responsibility; a willingness to respect and appreciate differences among individuals; to accept that there will be individual differences and that there should be a desire to find resolutions; and being willing to
acknowledge mistakes and permit encouragement (Stringer, 2004:34). McNiff (2002:18) states that action research entails creating opportunities for open-mindedness and to discuss differences. The school leaders who participated in this study, were able to build relationships by coming together to discuss issues and hold conversations. They often reported that they had held meetings at their schools, as they desired an exchange of opinions and feelings to occur. They succeeded, through their engagement in action research, to establish a sense of community, developing a sense of unity amongst themselves as a group.

**Collaborative nature of action research**

The McKeown *Collins Concise English Dictionary* (2008:330) describes collaboration as “to work with another or others on a joint project”. Collaboration is therefore linked to notions of engagement, participation and working jointly. It conveys working cooperatively, in partnership with others, to attain reciprocal goals and effect positive change (Piggot-Irvine, 2011:2). The basis of collaboration is shared goals (Oya & Smulyan, 1989:17) and shared vision (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009:50) open-mindedness, trust and shared vision. Cardno, as cited by Piggot-Irvine (2011), adds a different dimension to collaboration, stating that there are different degrees of involvement when individuals are sharing information.

Collaboration requires trust as an essential element (Pine, 2009:131; Piggot-Irvine in Zuber-Skerrit (2012:2). Trust entails relationships and interchanges with others. In an organisation such as a school, mutual exchanges between participants are compulsory. These exchanges demonstrate through their interactions how individuals see each other - implying that they view each other with respect, competence, personal concern for others, and honesty (Pine, 2009:133). When individuals interact with one another, mutual respect is displayed through the recognition of the other's self-worth and opinions, being considerate and respectful when interacting, and the extent to which the individuals are listening and talking to one another in an authentic manner. Trust also entails “vulnerability and risk”. “Trust is based on trust in oneself, repetitive interactions,
predictability of human behavior, reliability, dependability, meaningful communication, reciprocity, honesty, concern for others, and a reasonable degree of certainty in an often uncertain world. Trust is nurtured in a school environment characterised by good communication, shared decision-making opportunities for collegial learning, networking with outside environments, a norm of experimentation, and a commitment to continuous inquiry” (Fullan & Hargreaves (1996), cited by Pine (2009:133).

Pigott-Irvine (2012) in Zuber-Skerritt (2012) points out that collaboration offers several advantages. Individuals on whom the change will have an impact gain a say in the decisions that impact on them. This could lead to higher levels of ownership, acknowledgement, enthusiasm and dedication, as it can assist participants in relating to the objectives and anticipated results. The capacity of individuals could increase if their skillfulness and knowledge are totally utilised. Collaboration could also serve as a political lever, when key staff members with power serve on the same level as participants, who may be affected through the processes of collaboration. However, there is also a downside to collaboration. Constructing collaborative relationships takes a lot of time and difficulties emerge when engaging in continuous discussion and actions to develop, sustain and restore relationships (Pigott-Irvine, 2012). Time was cited as a restricting factor by some school leaders; it was often difficult to do certain tasks, such as having meetings, because educators felt that they already carried a heavy workload. They indicated that it was challenging at times to keep the project going, because of the constraints indicated above.

Cardno (1998:114) has developed five categories of collaboration, namely “information, consultation, discussion, involvement and participation”. The classification of collaboration, according to Cardno (1998) which has been utilised in this research study, is as follows:

*Level 1: Information:* Giving detailed information to people and receiving feedback
*Level 2: Consultation:* The formal or informal feedback from others is checked
**Level 3: Discussion:** Meetings are organised for talks and debates to elicit various opinions so that understanding can be increased

**Level 4: Involvement:** Requesting individuals to participate in devising plans, decision-making processes and assessment

**Level 5: Participation:** The total involvement of all individuals in every aspect of collecting data, planning, execution and assessment.

True collaboration is possible only when collaborative teams create opportunities for discussions and debates in which team members can share. They need to engage fully by participating and having a voice in putting together plans, decision-making and evaluating (Piggot-Irvine, in Zuber-Skerritt, 2012:4). The following model, which was developed by McMorland and Piggot-Irvine, 2000), illustrates the challenges that emerge when interchanges take place between groups of individuals. I used this model of McMorland and Piggot-Irvine (2000) according to my own interpretation, as reflected below.

**Stage 1:** McCorland and Piggot-Irvine (2000) refer to this level as “introduction”: At the beginning, the collaboration appears to be artificial, as differences are not discussed, nor are defense mechanisms revealed.

**Stage 2:** This stage is referred to as the “recognition of potential of self and others”: The second stage is characterised by an increase in recognising how the self is different from others. There is also a willingness to look at the multiplicity of insights regarding reality.

**Stage 3:** At this stage, a perspective of inquiry is secured as consciousness of the perceptions of others is increasing; in other words, “seeing through the eyes of others”.

**Stage 4:** This stage is called “transition to collaboration”, which implies that there is a move to collaboration by breaking away from one’s own perceptions and by making the transition to become more responsive to the perspectives of others.
Stage 5: This stage is referred to as “trust and co-generation”, as different levels of consciousness about the self and others are achieved through the research, resulting in taking action spontaneously, being open and trustful to one another, and growth and development.

The five stages presented above demonstrate the progression from artificial to deeper levels of interaction and are also linked to openness, trust and being creative in learning, which are all significant in action research. Achieving collaboration at the deepest level implies that interactive challenges such as becoming defensive and self-protective have to be overcome to achieve trust and an inquiry perspective. McMorland and Piggot-Irvine (2000) clearly make the point that trust can be developed only by the complex interchanges that take place between individuals.

Significant emphasis is placed on educators as constructors of knowledge in collaborative action research. The processes of collaborative action research, such as “sharing experiences”, engaging in critical discussion, giving feedback, coming up with new views and questions, having conversations about knowledge and understandings with other individuals, are essential in knowledge creation. Creating knowledge necessitates being critically aware of how individuals come to know. Knowledge can therefore only be developed through associations or relations with others (McNiff, 2010:20; Pine, 2009:118), accepting that there is a limit to how much an individual can learn and develop if we keep to ourselves (Pine, 2009:118). Knowing and learning are collective or shared activities. They demand an ongoing pattern of dialogue, argument or debate or discord and agreement/accord about the meaning thereof (Pine, 2009:118). This leads to emancipation, as new practical knowledge is created, but it also results in new capacities to create knowledge (Hughes (2003), cited by Gordon (2008:7)). Collaborative action research highlights the fact that educators are the creators or producers of knowledge, and it is therefore important to transform schools. Schools as centres of inquiry will now be explicated.

In 1967, Schaefer suggested that educators should make their schools centres of inquiry instead of maintaining schools as “distribution centres for information”. He stated
that through inquiry and exploration, educators would become more knowledgeable to teach certain skills demanded by society, while at the same time increasing their own wisdom and understanding, as well as their professional development (Oja and Smulyan, 1989:7; Pine, 2009:122). Schaefer (1967), cited by Oja and Smulyan (1989:7) supports collaborative action research through school-university partnerships, with the aim of generating context-specific knowledge that could be used immediately and also to promote the professional development of educators.

McNiff and Whitehead (2010:63) further state that action research takes place in “social situations”, with a particular objective in mind. The researcher must remain aware that the participants have the right to their own opinions and respect the fact that they are capable of thinking and reasoning for themselves. Researchers must also be mindful that they are living (McNiff & Whitehead, 2010:64) in a “pluralist society”, which demands consideration for the views and opinions of others and permits freedom of thought and opinion. It is important to realise that everyone should be included; no-one should be excluded. In order to come to a better understanding of one’s relationships with others, it is also important to realise that people come from different backgrounds; their values are different, and therefore their standpoints and perspectives will be different. They may see things differently or their opinions may differ from yours (McNiff & Whitehead, 2010:64).

During action research, there is interaction with other individuals, resulting in analytical talks, debates and the sharing of opinions. In this study, educators worked in collaboration with colleagues, fostering democracy, toward this research investigation, by appealing to all concerned to become actively involved. Very often, educators focus on reviewing their own work situations as a starting point to action research. They may involve other colleagues gradually. Learners, parents and members from the community must also become part of the process in order to give voice to all stakeholders (Lodico et al., 2010:320). In this research study, some schools had individuals working with them in embracing action research. The school leaders were encouraged by the group to also involve other educators.
4.4 ACTION RESEARCH PROCESS AS IMPLEMENTED BY SCHOOL LEADERS

The school leaders who participated in the action research project met twice a month at the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University. Most of the school leaders attended all the thirteen two-hourly sessions scheduled. These meetings or sessions were conducted in group format, since all the school leaders were expected to give feedback on their actions. The group members were encouraged to listen to each other, as the sessions were characterised by discussions, conversations and sharing. Three mentors were involved and attended the action research meetings, as explained above. A brief definition of a mentor as well as the required qualities of a mentor will now be provided.

4.4.1 Mentoring

According to Strong (2009:5), the word *mentor* has its genesis in Greek literature. The term mentor usually points to an advisor or counselor.

George (2010:33) defines mentoring as a practice in terms of which one individual, the mentor, is taking charge of another individual, the protégé, in addition to their usual relationship. The mentor is generally expected to possess ample knowledge, understanding and intellect, commitment, diligence and enthusiasm (Strong, 2009:5). There should also be mutual respect between the parties (Strong, 2009:5). In this study, the three mentors divided the schools among themselves, each responsible for guiding the respective school teams through the action research process. They attended the large group sessions and also visited the schools individually as consultants. The three mentors were all experienced educationalists who were contracted to work on this project and who worked as educational consultants on a free-lance basis.

According to Miller (2002:191), mentors should ideally have the following abilities:
They should show regard for the capabilities of their mentees and the fact that the mentees are entitled to make their own decisions. They should be honest, versatile and tolerant, have the ability to relate to different opinions, morals, customs and traditions, and be willing to accept these differences. Mentors should also show concern, respect and passion for specific areas of concern (Miller, 2002:191). In this study, the mentors demonstrated great interest in the participating schools and were always willing to give advice and share their expertise with the group. They were able to work with a diverse group of individuals and always demonstrated understanding of the context of the schools.

Different opinions exist among scholars with regard to the different steps in action research. Since it is a flexible and dynamic process, different scholars have respectively identified four, five or seven steps (Hien, 2009:100). The process implemented by the school leaders in this study consisted of four steps. I will first provide a table of number of sessions, as well as an indication of the planned activities. This will be followed by a diagrammatical presentation of the four-step action research process implemented by the school leaders.
TABLE 4.1: Planned sessions and activities for implementation of action research process

The following table is a plan of the number of sessions that was planned, as well as the envisaged tasks to be achieved at these sessions:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sessions</th>
<th>Planned activities for sessions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sessions 1 and 2</td>
<td>Introduction to action research and provision of guidelines to school leaders regarding problem identification and strategies for gathering data.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sessions 3 and 4</td>
<td>The school leaders reported back on problem identification and also shared with the group a plan of action to tackle the problems identified. They also informed the group about their data gathering strategies for evaluation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sessions 5 and 6</td>
<td>The school leaders reported to the group on the progress made with the implementation of the action plan.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sessions 7 and 8</td>
<td>Evidence was given by each team to show how the situation had improved.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sessions 9 and 10</td>
<td>Validation of data, giving guidelines regarding the writing of the report and the planning of the conference or seminar.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A diagram depicting the action research process consisting of four steps is presented below (Wood, 2010).
An explanation of the four-step action research process will now be provided:

**Step 1**: Identify a problem or issue

**Values**: Respect, integrity, honesty, care, equality, inclusion, collaboration, participation

**Step 2**: Reflect on your concern and gather data to support

**Step 3**: Act: Decide on and implement the action plan

**Step 4**: Evaluate and reflect on further action
STEP 1: PROBLEM IDENTIFICATION PHASE (Sessions 1 and 2)

The first step in the action research process, according to literature, is to consider one’s workplace in an attempt to diagnose an issue or some aspect of the workplace – the school that should be enhanced or modified. This can be something unique that has been considered or something that you want to understand better. In this study, the participating school leaders were asked to identify an issue or problem at their respective schools. They had to come up with a strategy as to how they would introduce the project to their wider school community. In order to identify a problem, they were asked to identify values that they would adhere to in the process and also to explain how they would embrace the principles of democracy, honesty and integrity, as the aims of this step of the process were as follows:

1. To make school leaders aware of the principles and values that should guide the action research process.
2. To enable school leaders to develop a plan to identify an issue at their school.

The following problems were identified by the school leaders:

School 1: Extending participation in extramural activities
School 2: Providing skills development for children with barriers to learning
School 3: Improving parental involvement
Schools 4 and 6: Improving safety at school
School 5: Improving the moral climate of the school
School 7: Improving collegial relationships at the school
School 8: Trying to instill a culture of reading
School 9: Addressing the high rate of teenage pregnancy

Values are important and function as guiding principles. Sometimes it is difficult to act or work according to one’s values in the workplace, because others may be preventing or depriving one from living and working the way one would like to, or it could be that one
is depriving oneself. For this reason, the participating school leaders had to reflect on their personal values, which were reflected in their strategies and in decisions. Respect, honesty, integrity, care, democracy, transparency and inclusion were some of the values identified as being extremely important to most of the school leaders.

The school leaders not only had to identify the concern they wished to address, but were also required to explain the process of problem identification that they had carried out, to ensure that they had involved other role-players in the school in the process, in line with the values of participation and democracy that underpin action research.

**STEP 2: REFLECTING ON ONE’S CONCERN AND GATHER DATA TO SUPPORT PHASE (Sessions 2 and 3)**

Data must be gathered to enable you to aid comprehension of the issue. The aim of this fledgling information gathering process is to gain clear insight into the inherent qualities of the issue (Lodico et al. (2010:321). This phase means that information needs to be collected about the problem and data generated to support the existence of the problem.

During these sessions, the school leaders had to reflect on the identified issue and why it was an issue to them. The aim of these sessions was to point out to school leaders the importance of gathering data to demonstrate why they were concerned. The feedback from school leaders indicated that most of them had arranged staff meetings so that further discussions and debates could take place about the issue that they intended to investigate. Some school leaders responded that they had used brainstorming sessions in order to obtain ideas from the whole staff, while some indicated that they had held a poll on particular topics, to determine which specific topic reflected their collective concern. The group was also made aware that the issue should be converted into a research question, for example:

*How can we improve school safety?*
How can we improve parental involvement at our school?

The role of the mentors was explained to the group. During Session 3, school leaders gave feedback about their data gathering methods to show why they were concerned. They also shared their topics or issues with the group, and also informed their mentors about their topic. In turn, the mentors shared their expertise and ideas with the school leaders. Inclusion as a value was lived out in this study, as the school leaders frequently reported that their goal was to include all staff members by creating opportunities for consultation and conversations. These school leaders valued the opinions from all staff members and therefore illustrated that they respected individual differences as well.

**STEP 3: ACT: DECIDE ON AND IMPLEMENT ACTION PLAN PHASE (Sessions 4, 5 and 6)**

In action research, collaboration takes place between all stakeholders, such as learners, educators, parents, mentors and the community. Collaborators are individuals who can assist in gathering and analysing information and also in one’s considerations and thinking (Lodico et al., 2010:324). This is evidence of the democratic practices and approaches inherent to action research, as there is no division in terms of hierarchies: as everybody is regarded as equal (Lodico et al., 2010:325). A decision must be taken regarding what should be done to enhance the situation in the workplace (Lodico et al., 2010:325).

The reasons for engaging in action research were discussed, such as that school leaders should become role models; meaning that they had to do things: they should not only be head educators, but also head learners. School leaders presented reports on what they had decided to do. Some school leaders shared some of the difficulties that they had experienced at their schools. For example, one school leader reported that it was extremely difficult to keep educators motivated, as they were constantly pressurised. They were encouraged to write and explain in detail what actions had been
taken. Challenges, as well as successes, were discussed and shared to enable other school leaders to learn from them. The purpose of this sharing and discussing what was happening in their schools, was to positively influence others. During Session 6, the school leaders were also encouraged to make sure that they had gathered evidence on the impact of the project and of their learning at their schools. Reflecting on one’s values is extremely important in striving for continuous improvement in schools. Schools are responsible for their own development and growth to acquire certain skills, as changes are ongoing. Some school leaders were enthusiastically attempting to invite all stakeholders, for example by reaching out to members of the community including past learners to become involved and to assist with the coaching of their sports teams. In this manner they demonstrated their concern and care for their school community as they believed that their contributions could be most valuable in enhancing the lives of their learners.

The planned strategies must now be implemented. These strategies or programmes of action came about through democratic and collaborative processes and reflection.

**STEP 4: EVALUATE AND REFLECT ON FURTHER ACTION PHASE (Session 7)**

The main aim of this session (Session 7) was to encourage school leaders to reflect on the process of action research that they had implemented. They had to think about the effect action research had had on their growth, learning and development as school leaders. They also had to think about what they had learnt as a result of undertaking action research. This step actually comprised an assessment process to reflect about the change and whether it had made a positive or negative impact. During Session 8, the school leaders had to report on the progress made with their projects. They explained to the group exactly what actions had been taken at their schools. The school leaders had to tentatively write up their reports. The emphasis was on the steps that the school leaders had to follow according to the action research booklet distributed during the first session. Dates for the draft reports and for the conference were given to the school leaders at this session (Session 9).
It grew apparent that extra sessions were needed to facilitate the writing of the report. Sessions 10, 11, 12 and 13 focused on the report writing process and preparation for the seminar. Firstly, assistance was offered to the school in terms of writing the report. During session 11, copies were circulated among the group so that they could see what a report should look like. School leaders were guided on how to start with the report and what to include, and were also advised on the length of the report. One of the mentors explained to the school leaders the purpose of writing the report, including that they could be used for research purposes and by educators. The proposed seminar or conference was then discussed. The seminar would take the form of an interactive presentation. Each school would have a table or a station at which they could display copies of their reports, photographs and a display. There was an opportunity for the school leaders to become creative in planning their presentations. School leaders would be available at these stations to explain and talk to interested people. School leaders would each be given five minutes to present an overview of their project to the audience. Some school leaders were keen to learn who would be attending the conference. It was indicated that school leaders and community members would be invited to attend. During the last two sessions (Sessions 12 and 13), the focus remained on writing the reports and finalising the arrangements for the conference. In writing the reports, the importance of realising of one’s values was highlighted. It was important that the school leaders expressed their learning personally as well as how engagement with the project had impacted or changed their leadership abilities.

4.5 CONCLUSIONS

In this chapter, the definition, types, benefits and characteristics of action research were explained. The chapter concluded with the outline of the action research process as implemented by the school leaders. In Chapter Five, a discussion of the research findings will be presented.
CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS OF RESEARCH STUDY

5.1 INTRODUCTION

In Chapter Four, a theoretical explication of the action research process was provided. The action research process, as implemented by the participating school leaders, was explained and justified. In this chapter, the findings will be presented in the narrative format, supported with *verbatim* quotations from the transcribed interviews, field notes and extracts from the project reports. The main themes identified will be discussed and presented separately. In addition, the findings will be contrasted and supported with relevant literature for the purpose of substantiation.

The research questions formulated are presented as follows:

**Main research question**

*What are the potential benefits of an action research approach to improving school functioning?*

**Secondary research questions**

- *What are the experiences of school leaders as they implement an action research project to address an issue that is negatively impacting on school functioning?*

- *What are the challenges facing school leaders in the implementation of an action research approach to addressing problematic issues in their school?*
What recommendations can be made with regard to the use of action research as a tool for assisting school leaders in addressing issues that impact negatively on school functioning?

The data analysis revealed that the school leaders had experienced the action research process as a transformative one. Table 5.1 summarises the main and sub-themes:

TABLE 5.1: Themes and Sub-themes emerging from data analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>THEMES</th>
<th>SUB-THEMES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 1. School leaders experience action research as a transformative process | 1.1 Transformation in thinking  
|                                                  | 1.2 Transformation in leadership practices  
|                                                  | 1.3 Transformation on a personal level          |
| 2. Action research contributes to transformation in school | 2.1 Improves the climate of the school  
|                                                  | 2.2 Action research makes a practical difference |
| 3. Action research is a challenging process       | 3.1 Lack of time  
|                                                  | 3.2 Lack of resources and influence of external factors  
|                                                  | 3.3 Lack of collaboration  
|                                                  | 3.4 Reflection on challenges leads to improvement |

5.2 DISCUSSION OF THEMES

The three main themes that emerged from the data analysis will now be discussed.

5.2.1 School leaders experience action research as a transformative process

The participants remarked that they had experienced the action research process as a transformative process, in terms of how they had begun to think, behave and interact with others.
5.2.1.1 Transformation in thinking

The participants indicated that they had found the process to be transformative in terms of their thinking. Some indicated that the action research process had fostered creative and innovative thinking. As two participants said: “The action research process actually forces us to become creative in providing solutions to challenging situations.” “It developed us to ‘think out of the box’ and to accept critical feedback.” One participant said that he had learnt to encourage the questioning of his opinions: “As leaders, we also learnt that we must welcome having our own ideas challenged and actually encourage it.” Another participant stated that he had become so self-centred and so involved in what he was doing that he had diminished his potential for being a creative thinker: “We have learnt that we are so wrapped up in our little cocoons that we sometimes cannot think “out of the box”.

Some participants stated that the action research process had given them the opportunity to really think intensely about issues and how to find solutions to challenges.

   It allowed for a deeper process of thinking and application to fixing challenge.

Another participant said that the process had stimulated them to be more imaginative and fostered innovative ways of thinking:

   It encourages people to be innovative, creative in their thinking.

One participant observed that the project had transformed his thinking about his learners, helping him to view them in a more positive light and raising his awareness of the necessity to really understand their perceptions. He remarked as follows:

   The project changed our perceptions about our learners and their reading.
   We found that more learners read than what we originally thought, that our
learners do have access to books and that a number of them belong to public libraries. We also found that learners have a better perception of themselves as readers than teachers do and that they have a more positive attitude to reading than we originally thought. Learners are also aware of the positive benefits of reading, something we thought they were not aware of.

Literature confirms that through action research, educators are exposed to innovative and imaginative ways of thinking, behaving and relating to each other. As Kemmis (2010:426) explains:

Action research aims to explore new ways of doing things, new ways of thinking, and new ways of relating to one another and the world in the interest of finding new ways that are more likely to be for the good of each person and for the good of humankind and more likely to help us live sustainably.

The above remarks from the participants indicated that the project had permitted them to think in “new ways” and had also given them the opportunity to perform their tasks in different ways. They were made aware that action research is a way of investigating, and searching for ways to improve.

Batagiannis (2011) makes the point that our initial plans do not always generate the best solutions; therefore, it may be pivotal to adopt approaches such as action research that embody activities such as exploring, learning and experimenting, which may result in solutions of a higher quality. Too often school leaders are pressurised by parents, staff and the community to act, consequently spending their time in ‘putting out fires’, which is an exhausting process for all concerned. The action research process influenced the leaders to move away from what Batagiannis (2007) calls “instantaneous perfection”, and forced them to start thinking differently about how to handle situations. This could help them become “visionary, courageous leaders” who will choose to
“explore the deeper issues”, which involves careful thinking about the situation and its possible solutions (Batagiannis, 2011).

Transformation in thinking and reasoning must first be proceeded by awareness that the status quo can be changed, and that there is more than one way to do it (Wood, 2009). Research conducted by Engelbrecht, Oswald and Forlin (2006:126) confirms that for transformation to take place in schools, perceptive and dedicated school leaders who are committed to strong values such as inclusion, equality, collaboration and democracy are required. The quotations of the school leaders in this project seem to indicate that they had developed in their ability to think inclusionally and critically. The project promoted critical thinking and allowed for the learning of a process that could then “be applied to other areas where challenges exist.” Action research is a useful methodology to be employed when dealing with other challenges in the school and it also allows for thinking systematically.

*We are developing a more detailed systematic approach and looking at the challenges, that allows you to then set up the system and to have a much more sustainable response to challenges we might have in future.*

There was also evidence that the school leaders’ participation in the project had improved their ability to think strategically and heightened their awareness of the need to constantly reflect on actions and thinking: “*We have learnt many things from this project. We have also learnt that we need to be evaluating and modifying constantly to assess whether the goals we set for the school are still relevant and whether we are still on track.*” One school leader indicated that the experience of participating in this project had made him realise that making one kind of change would generate unexpected benefits in other areas. It also helped him to understand the parents better. There was a change in attitude and thinking, as the school leader indicated that his ‘eyes had been opened’ by understanding the many reasons why parents were uninvolved in school activities. This resulted in the other staff members also becoming more aware, which
increased their interest and commitment. This improved their ability to think critically, contextually and reflectively, generating many unpredicted benefits.

The individual can be changed because of the participatory thread in action research, in the view of Koirola-Azad and Fuentes (2009-2010:3). They assert that: “This can be seen as a process of opening our own eyes and seeing the world through different eyes, coupled with a desire to open others eyes” (Koirola-Azad & Fuentes, 2009-2010:3). This implies that through action research, educators could gain new insights and raise their awareness, which could cause them to influence others to gain new perspectives. One of the mentors made the following comment at one of the formal sessions: “If you change an individual, you change a school.” If one educator's awareness was raised to view things from a different perspective, that educator could possibly influence other colleagues positively. The learning process of the participants during the process had broadened their minds and made them realise that they did not have to work alone to improve situations. It also seemed to heighten their awareness of the fact that the issues facing them were complex and multi-dimensional and therefore needed to be fully understood before action could be taken:

We have learned that we can help ourselves. We have learned to work as a team, together with other structures, like the Police, LoveLife, parents learners and other staff members. We have also learned that action research is an ongoing thing, where there is not a “right or wrong” approach. Rather, it is a process that develops us, and has helped us to understand situations better. This is the first time we are doing “research!”.

Action research is a never-ending process of evolving learning and action and also entails reflection on learning and actions (McNiff & Whitehead, 2006:33). There are no final answers, as knowledge is unpredictable and open to debate. Therefore, the results that emerge from action research cannot be predetermined, since action is linked to a specific context (McNiff & Whitehead, 2006:27) “a question may generate multiple answers”.
Finally, the participants also indicated that their experiences in the action research project had helped them to review and rethink their strategies and actions and critically reflect on their leadership; their experiences had also helped them to become more solution-oriented, rather than problem focused.

*It broadened my vision to accept challenges as a learning experience and not to be content the way things are, but to look for improvements by constantly reflecting in order to improve my teaching practice.*

*As a methodology I think that action research is the way to go, because it’s practical and doable, because it’s you asking yourself what you do? Because working in such a project gives one time for reflection, whereby you don’t just do things for the sake of doing them, but you do them with an objective in mind.*

*We thought we will start with some things: we are going to have satellite meetings in the areas where the parents live; we will make use of a bundle SMS, the only problem is that parents change their telephone numbers all the time. The school is not communicating with the parents, because the kids do not give the letters to them. But, we are not looking for excuses, but for solutions.*

The project seems to have assisted them to become more receptive and open to change, and keen to search for new opportunities to develop and grow (Bruce & Pine, 2010:48). This transformation in their thinking had also influenced their behavior as leaders.
5.2.1.2  Transformation in leadership practices

The participants provided many examples of how their participation in the project had helped them to modify their leadership styles and practices, encouraging them to move from an autocratic approach to a more democratic one.

*Yes it did. I used to be autocratic in my leadership and this created tension in my school. Action research opened my mind to share ideas, with colleagues and work together in achieving our goal, not my goal.*

As leaders adopted the more democratic approaches required by action research (McNiff & Whitehead, 2006), they also realised the need to consider the input of others and allow others the opportunity to demonstrate decision-making and leadership skills:

*I think the lesson of it all, I think the first lesson was that, I had an idea of what I thought the project should be, but the process of action research overturned my one, and it allows me to conform with the decision of the staff as well, so so, and I’m grateful that that happened …*

Another school leader who had previously been inclined to adopt a “leader knows best” attitude, stated that he now realised that this approach was unacceptable:

*I would walk into the room with an idea that I would have to convince you is best for you, because you have no idea what is good for you. How vain can that be?*

It is vital that school leaders become transformational leaders who serve as role models and are esteemed by their colleagues. The charismatic facet of transformational leadership refers to the need to lead by example and to practise moral values, such as integrity, trust, honesty and respect (Stone, Russell & Patterson, 2004:351). Action research requires the embodiment of such values (McNiff & Whitehead, 2006) and the
action research process will therefore encourage the development of transformational leadership styles.

Passion, interest, hope and a positive attitude are some elements that school leaders need to exhibit as transformational leaders. They must be committed to building relationships by means of interaction and communication, enabling a sense of community to develop, which will result in the alignment of the values of the leaders and their followers, in the interest of the common good of the institution. This means that school leaders must be optimistic about the future and that their sharing of goals and power is important (Stone et al., 2004:351).

School leaders who are transformational leaders acknowledge and respect individual differences in people (Stone et al., 2004:351). They regard people as individuals and not just as team members (Dionne, Yammarino, Atwater & Spangler, 2004:182). They consider personal development and growth as important and therefore provide a climate of support to permit people to develop their potential at the highest level (Stone et al., 2004:351). This is applied by the delegation of tasks, which are then discreetly monitored to see if more support or guidance is required (Stone et al., 2004:351). Furthermore, they strive to construct a “one-to-one relationship” with their team members in order to listen attentively to their problems and attend to their personal needs. Team members are empowered in this way and the lines of communication between transformational leaders and their followers are enhanced (Dionne et al., 2004:185). Action research can thus be employed by school leaders as a way of beginning the process of changing themselves.

A school leader who wanted to show his concern to his staff, shared his chosen approach with me, stating that he had initiated a personal interview with each staff member, in the form of a one-on-one conversation, on a yearly basis. He said that he had adopted this approach to allow each staff member to be open and honest with him. He wanted to facilitate two-way communication by having a one-on-one talk. He hit on this idea, because at staff meetings many educators did not always open up to give
their views. He believed that in this manner he could foster communication, while simultaneously making the educators feel more valued.

During my visit to this particular school, the school leader indicated that one female educator had complained of the lack of liquid soap in the ladies’ room, stating that this was unacceptable. She was clearly upset about this set-up at the school, labeling this as an unhygienic practice. He listened to her and addressed her concern by purchasing the desired item. He reported that he was actually overwhelmed with the tremendous change in attitude of that particular colleague. The relevant school leader was displaying certain elements of transformational leadership by revealing his concern and treating each staff member as an individual.

Several participants indicated that involvement with the action research project had raised their awareness of the importance of creating opportunities to develop not only themselves, but also their staff members.

*It allowed me to give other colleagues an opportunity to initiate, lead and develop programmes. Allowed for personal capacitation of other staff members. Allowed me to see that when people take charge and are part of the original idea, they are willing to own the idea and see it through to the end.*

King (2011:152) found that once principals believed that certain people possessed certain strengths and that they were better in certain areas than the school leaders, they tended to believe that these people should be used, because they had the capacity to perform certain tasks well. This underscores the statement by McNiff and Whitehead (2006:46) that the development and expansion of people’s capacity lies at the heart of action research. An enabling leadership style is required in such a situation by giving top-down support to staff to put into practice a bottom-up approach (King, 2011:152).
As one participant, who had been experiencing many difficulties in establishing collegiality amongst the staff, said:

*The leader becomes the follower and also learns.*

By demonstrating his willingness to take up a position alongside his colleagues, he had created a learning opportunity in which he could learn from his staff and they could learn from him. Batagiannis (2011:1309) calls this “mutual learning” and “transformational learning”, another crucial facet of action research that underscores continuous learning. Learning is a social process, and in this study, many of the participants realised that if “many fine minds” (Bennis, 2007:4) came together, the outcome would be collective wisdom accomplished because of continuous interacting with staff (Batagiannis, 2011:1309).

Literature confirms that leadership is grounded in a relationship, because one cannot be a leader without followers (Bennis, 2007:4). Bennis refers to it as a “tripod”, meaning that this relationship consists of “leaders, followers and a common goal”. An interdependence exists between these three aspects of leadership. The example given was only one of many in which the participants related an increased willingness to collaborate and share their role as leaders, placing themselves in the position of their followers, shifting roles, showing an interest to listen to the others, whilst creating the space for them to lead and to be developed as leaders (Cerit, 2009). The participants were not only learning from the project through their own experiences and from the other participants, but they were also re-skilling their staff and helping them to develop and grow, which is a desired outcome of the participatory and emancipatory approach adopted in this study (Batagiannis, 2011). They changed from being self-centred to developing a certain sense of “other-centredness” (Zuber-Skerritt, 2011:231); and adopting a collectivist stance (Batagiannis, 2011:1323), which is typical of transformational leaders.
Acceptance of the responsibility to plan and apply their own learning by school leaders, is confirmed in the literature (Piggot-Irvine, 2011:285). In the process of developing the self as leader, the emphasis is on being willing to experiment, practising what one has learnt (Piggot-Irvine, 2011:285). Action research has been related to leadership development programmes, as it entails collaboratively researching an issue that needs to be improved within an organisation by “inside researchers” (Piggot-Irvine, 2011:285).

This was demonstrated in this study, because the school leaders were researching an issue that needed improvement in their capacity as school leaders, thus becoming action researchers (see Appendix E (participant reports)). They exhibited their willingness to try out different strategies and to experiment with their colleagues in order to enrich their own knowledge, in the belief that “authentic transformation” would take place. Prendergast (2002:6) claims that an effective school realises that the enhancement of teaching and learning can be accomplished through a “constellation of individuals and groups who undertake a myriad of activities and initiatives” in which they continuously reflect and revise their practices as they are directed by their goals.

The above discussion emphasises the importance for leaders to learn to be good followers, according to Buchanan (2007:35). In learning to become followers and serving others, they will sooner or later be acknowledged as leaders. It is imperative that school leaders model the behaviours of transformational leaders as well as transformational learners if they want their colleagues to become transformational learners as well as transformational leaders (Batagiannis, 2011:1316).

Engagement with the action research project enabled the development and establishment of relationships with parents, learners and colleagues. Positive relationships among all role-players facilitated positive change in attitudes and behaviours among the participating educators.
One participant said it had facilitated the development and in some instances the improvement of relationships between the school, the parents, staff members, learners and the community:

*It helped us to develop relationships between parents, colleagues, learners and community.*

She stated further that it had helped her to develop and improve relationships, not only with her own colleagues on staff, but also with school leaders at other schools. She experienced the action research sessions as a boost that had resulted in the formation of a web where educators could share as well as learn from one another through “interaction”:

*Enrichment i.e. (networking) sharing with other colleagues and learning from them through interaction during sessions.*

Another school leader commented as follows:

*The fact that one can make positive changes at the school that not only better the school but also help to form a better relationship with parents and have a mutual understanding for the difficulties they have in bringing up their children. It also helped me to realise what the attitude of some parents are towards education as a whole.*

The importance of developing sound relationships as part of effective leadership has been documented in many studies. Dialogue, mutuality and participation are major concepts in what Jacobs (2010:370) calls “transformational approaches”. Jacobs (2010:370) emphasises that dialogue is extremely important in the building of collaborative relationships between all role-players, such as research investigators and their communities, as an ongoing process of conversation and the exchange of opinions. Improved communication is vital. Ledwith and Springett (2010) in Walton (2011:129-130) call it a “connected knowing” that appears from trusting relationships.
They state that: “it is the power of connection that leads to new ways of knowing: people feel respected, heard, affirmed and validated… In exploring multiple truths, we discover that mutuality maintains our identities within a notion of a common good” (Ledwith & Springett (2010), cited by Walton (2011:129-130). The “social spaces” that are created for participants to discuss their experiences and information, to establish shared meanings and joint actions, highlight the significance of dialogue as a central component of participatory action research (Jacobs, 2010:370).

It is also evident that during these encounters and exchanges, some individuals will agree and disagree with one another. Misinterpretations and understanding will be inevitable, which demonstrates that collaboration is a complex and formidable process (Jacobs, 2010:370). Action research caters for this conflict, as its goals are not to reach agreement, but it has the capacity to tolerate, to discuss and talk about such differences (McNiff, 2002:18).

Many of the participants stated that they had held or attended several staff meetings and brainstorming sessions where staff members came together to discuss certain aspects of the project. One participant said: “We decided today at a staff meeting that we are going to choose just one skill. The staff came up with a lot of brilliant ideas at this meeting and a lot of learning is taking place.”

Participation in the project not only appears to have changed the professional conduct of the school leaders, but also had an impact on a personal level.

5.2.1.3 Transformation on a personal level

Although I recognise that the personal and professional selves are not mutually exclusive and that in practice people tend to display the same styles in a personal and professional context, for the purposes of this discussion I have made a distinction, since it seemed to be a recurrent theme.
One participant stated that the project had not only been useful in solving school problems, but that it was also a process that afforded the opportunity to learn more about the self:

\[ \text{Not only do you solve problems at school, you also learn a lot about yourself during the process.} \]

Another participant said that the skills acquired could be used to solve personal difficulties and could be applied in many aspects of life.

\[ \text{The skills can also be used in dealing with our own personal challenges, as what we have learnt is applicable in all walks of life.} \]

An indication of how personal growth could affect the professional context was offered by one participant, who said that it also helped him to develop intrinsic motivation and that as a result he felt more satisfied in his job.

\[ \text{I experienced job satisfaction through determination and perseverance in the implementation of the project; I became intrinsically motivated when I saw what positive response the learners demonstrated.} \]

Literature confirms that the job satisfaction of educators are influenced by a number of factors, including self-determination, the need to make a difference in communities, their own ideas about the support from their principal, work conditions and leadership (Cerit, 2009:606). Educators who experience contentment in the workplace will most likely be more than eager to sacrifice more time and energy in educative strategies (Cerit, 2009:601). The above remarks indicate that a sense of satisfaction had been achieved and more importantly, that this participant had been inspired, which is so crucial in schools today, taking into account the many complexities that school leaders have to contend with. The fact that the participating school leaders were encouraged would
hopefully lead to the encouragement of others, which could possibly result in higher levels of productivity.

Action research has been shown to lead to both personal development (Cardno, 2006) and professional development (McNiff & Whitehead, 2006:7). Leadership is required for developing educators, as King (2011:150) points out: “Professional development does not just happen – it has to be managed and led or led and supported.” This is applicable to this study, where many of the school leaders willingly accepted the project by taking the initiative to introduce it to their staff and by involving themselves with their teams of school leaders, including educators, parents and learners. It is also indicative or symbolic of the “new professionalism” that is being championed to include collaboration and participation in “decision-making, problem-solving and planning” (King, 2011:149).

Professional development should focus on activities that can be applied to practice, to be able to provide evidence and permit opportunities for critical reflection. Furthermore, King (2011:150) favours collaborative professional development, as she encourages “shared learning and support” between a few colleagues on an ongoing basis so as to empower educators to transform their own practices. This is what the action research project encouraged, first during the group sessions, and then among the individual school communities. Mindful of the need to provide support for the school leaders in transferring and implementing their learning in the school environment, the project provided for mentors who worked with the school leaders in addressing their challenges.

5.2.2 Theme 2: Action research contributes to transformation in school

The study revealed that most of the participating school leaders had experienced noticeable changes in the climate of the school, as people began to feel more confident and positive as they were enabled to live out their values through the implementation of the principles of action research. Participants reported that they experienced enthusiasm, educators felt more relaxed, teaching and learning improved, and the atmosphere was more easy-going. They also thought that action research had helped
them make a practical difference to the situation and that they had therefore made a functional improvement in the school.

5.2.2.1 Improves the climate of the school

Several of the participants stated that the culture and spirit at their schools had been enhanced by their participation. One participant stated that it was a constructive way of engaging everyone in order to ensure that the school climate would become more pleasant for everyone:

*Action research is a useful way of getting everyone in the school involved in making the school environment a pleasant one.*

One school leader asserted that the atmosphere at the school had changed in a positive way, as the learners and staff members were very enthusiastic about the action research project. Their joint focus was the introduction of an extra-mural programme that would enable them as a school community to live out their values of loyalty, diligence and respect (see Participant Reports in Appendix E). This programme made provision for the inclusion of all their grades (4 – 7) and it was evident that the learners enjoyed working as a team. For example, some learners had been selected to represent their school at a rugby tournament in Somerset East. To increase their self-esteem, these learners were acknowledged and honoured at a general assembly at the school. In this manner, they were taught to be proud of themselves and to be proud of their school. This school had also begun to practice a high regard for their parents, as commented by a school leader. “*Parents are always welcomed and the school goes out of their way to let the parents know that they are being valued. Our parents are welcome to visit the school at any time, we do not restrict our parents.*” As staff members lacked knowledge and coaching skills, they did not hesitate to call on the community to assist them with the different sports codes. Local clubs had been called upon to assist the school and the learners were also utilised to take charge of coaching sessions, thus indicating an improved ability to problem-solve, and maintain enthusiasm
when structural and resource barriers were encountered. This is confirmed by a statement from another participant: “We have also been amazed by the talents of our children, given the chance to display them, and have been reminded that we must never underestimate a child’s ability.

The staff also realised that children possessed different interests and talents. Those learners who were not interested in sport were catered for by the provision of cultural activities such as music and art. The paintings of the learners were sold via the internet and in this way funds had been raised for the school. Loyalty and a sense of pride in the school were instilled in the learners, parents and the wider community through the living out of their democratic value of inclusion. I can personally attest to this, as I was very impressed during my visit to the school, to see the shared values of the school painted on a wall in the principal’s office. The improved climate was summed up by the following quotation from another participant:

This has been an exciting process for us, and as we reflect on what we have learnt, we are excited about the potential for positive change in our school and motivated to know that we can make a definite positive input into the lives of our learners and community.

These remarks from the participants indicate that they had become more enthusiastic and that their passion for teaching had increased. This was because there was also a definite change in the behavior of some learners. Those learners who were previously disruptive, had now become role models to their peers. Some of the strategies that were implemented, such as the extramural activities, helped to improve the self-confidence and behavior of many of the learners. For example, learners were being rewarded for good behavior by being allowed to participate in the Sports Programme, in which they were coached by an outside organisation. School peer leaders had been introduced by the school’s action research team, which was also paying off. The school had previously experienced disciplinary problems relating to bullying and violent behaviour; through the project, the discipline of the learners had improved to such an extent that staff members
had become more optimistic and enthusiastic. Their passion for teaching and learning had been rekindled. The participant confirms that there had been a decrease in fighting and that formerly aggressive learners had shown an improvement in behavior. However, the participant also acknowledged that it would take time to deal with certain matters. She affirmed that the project had been a positive experience for the learners, educators and the community, if considered from a broad perspective.

If educators succeed in changing poorly behaved learners who exhibited violent behaviour, this is already evidence of success, because those learners will soon become adult members of society. Violent behavior needs to be addressed sooner rather than later. Another team member from the same primary school stated at one of the formal action research sessions: “We had a discussion with the staff to change the topic to discipline as more and more boys are coming to school with knives; which shows that the learners are inclined to be violent and we fear that this could carry on and be regarded as acceptable.” The school is a microcosm of society; by carrying knives to school and fighting, these learners were actually mirroring their homes and communities at large. By embarking on this project, the participants demonstrated their concern, attempting to dissuade learners from becoming criminals and murderers later on in their lives (Batagiannis, 2007).

So much new energy, interest and enthusiasm had been generated that the school had already identified fundraising as a project for the following year, during which they would again make use of the action research cycle. Action research therefore seems to facilitate an increase of confidence among educators, learners and parents.

Grudens-Schuck (2004:5) makes the point that action research is work, but that action research can be enjoyable, interesting and professionally enriching and satisfying. Transformation in practice and professional development is possible through action research, as it allows educators or school leaders to work jointly on a project.
Several participants maintained that they had become able to live out their identified values such as respect, honesty, commitment, perseverance, compassion, empathy, democratic participation, collaboration, social justice, trust, inclusion, accountability and responsibility. They said that through the project, they had reaffirmed their stance of working together in a democratic manner:

….. this process reinforced our convictions about the value of democratic, inclusive ways of working.

One participant identified his values as follows:

My values are professionalism, integrity, respect and Ubuntu. I cannot live without these values and therefore I strive to see that they are practised. They have to practise Ubuntu because a person is a person because of others.

The above statement demonstrates the importance of values in the personal and professional lives of individuals and also that values are the driving force of action research. As stated by McNiff and Whitehead (2005:28), values are “guiding principles”, as they give direction in terms of making choices and decisions. In this case, the school leader was guided by his strong values and therefore made a choice and a decision to persist with the action research project (McNiff & Whitehead, 2005:28). His inspiration and perseverance stemmed from the fact that he did not want to be a “living contradiction” (McNiff & Whitehead, 2006:46). The identified problem, which was chosen as the focus of the action research project, was the improvement of collegial relationships. It became apparent during the course of the project that the root of the conflict between the educators at the relevant school was that their personal values were not aligned with the values of the school leader, or at least they were not living out their values. One example is professionalism, a value that was highly regarded by the school leader, yet some staff members behaved in an extremely unprofessional manner by swearing at the learners. This was totally unacceptable to the school leader.
Continuous fights among staff members occurred, evident of a lack of professionalism. Professionalism is described as occupational groups with specialist knowledge, ability and trust who deliver their services on a continual basis with the aim of improving their communities (O'Sullivan & West-Burnham, 2011) cited by King (2011:150). If one considers this description of professionalism, then it is obvious that the behavior of these educators was not beneficial to the learners, but rather detrimental. This participant said:

They seem to be happy to practice the wrong thing. …. And this frustrates me because I cannot change to the wrong group but I cannot give up trying to convince them that using vulgar language at school is a bad thing.

He was aware of the need to facilitate the identification of common values among the staff, so that they could work more collaboratively: “Values have to be communicated amongst staff members and all need to know the goal strived for so as to work towards achieving that goal.” Although this school did not manage to complete the project and write it up, the participant persevered with the action research approach and reported a positive change in the climate at the school.

Literature confirms that action research emphasises real change and believing in challenging the current state of affairs. “A belief and hope” that transformation is possible, has been highlighted by Schoen (2007) in Batagiannis (2011:1308). The above statement demonstrates that the relevant school leader in this study refused to give up; he had faith and “hope” that the situation could be improved (Batagiannis, 2011:1308). He had the perseverance, trust and confidence to continue and to give his full support regarding the action research process, and this proved fruitful, as some of his colleagues were in the end willing to participate and to change. In this regard, McNiff (1993:18) maintains that people can transform their workplaces and that their workplaces can transform them. She explains:
This interface between person and practice is the process of theory building, which involves a critical reflection on the process of ‘reflection in action’, and legitimates the notion of a changing individual interacting with a changing world (McNiff, 1993:18)

Other participants indicated that the project had helped them to become stronger and also held benefits for the learners, as the climate of the school had become more caring and kindlier.

*The action research project has increased our resilience.*

*The school environment has transformed into one that is nurturing and supportive in order for the learners to feel confident and enjoy what they do.*

McNiff and Whitehead (2006:23) confirm that action research is usually conducted by people who are attempting to live out the values that motivate them. Practices are always influenced by the values that the people within those practices hold, therefore practices are not only “value laden”, but also value-driven” (McNiff & Whitehead, 2005:28). These values function as guiding principles, as they give direction to the personal and professional lives of people (McNiff & Whitehead, 2005:28). People frequently experience themselves, in Whitehead’s own words: as a “living contradiction” when their values are not realised (McNiff & Whitehead, 2006:46-47). McNiff and Whitehead (2006:24) reiterate that when action researchers decide to find a way of living in the direction of their values, it can become complicated to do so, because researching one’s practices ultimately means involving others. Their values may be different, which means that talking and negotiating have to take place (McNiff & Whitehead, 2006:24). In McNiff and Whitehead’s words: “..... it is easy to say but difficult to do” (McNiff & Whitehead, 2006:24). In line with this, one school participant stated as follows:
… (the) biggest challenge is to live out one’s values.

One of the mentors raised the point that good schools usually had strong values. It appear as if this project had contributed to a better climate in the schools, as the participants were encouraged to identify their values and find ways to live them out in their leadership practices, thereby influencing the same process in their respective schools.

5.2.2.2 Action research makes a practical difference

All participants indicated that a practical improvement in their schools had been noticeable. This is also evident from the reports (see Appendix E). Some indicated that their schools benefitted from action research, as it is a systematic way of addressing issues. With action research, all role-players need to be involved, and it also encouraged school leaders to be proactive instead of reactive.

… the powerful notion that human systems could only be understood and changed if one involves the members of the system in the inquiry process itself (Coghlan, cited by Brydon-Miller et al. (2003:14)),

The process of continual evaluation and reflection also allowed other areas that needed attention to emerge.

The process allowed us to have an in-depth look at how we could approach programmes of the school for the improvement and development of the school.

All the project reports indicated an improvement in all target areas in the schools. For example:
The use of the school yard as a thoroughfare has stopped. The number of burglaries has declined. There have been no further reports of learners being lost or going off with an unauthorised person.

Action research gives whole school development the chance to select a focus area and try to improve on it. In this way, the mountain is moved one stone at a time.

The leader from the one school that did not submit a report believed that there had not been enough improvement in his chosen area (the improvement of collegial relationships), but the fact that he had developed as a leader was evident that his involvement in the project had made a difference. However, we chose to respect his request and did not push him to write a self-reflective report. An excerpt from his interview confirms his heightened self-awareness:

I learnt that I must live my values of honesty, respect of human dignity and lead by example. Also involve all members in decision making and I have to win over my colleagues who are reluctant to address our problem. I cannot give up trying to convince them.

The leaders believed that the process of action research had given them focus and a coherent way to attend to problems that had earlier on seemed too complex to address. It gave them a ‘way in’ and helped to bring about improvement. The continual reflection also helped to spotlight other areas that required attention and provided direction towards on-going school improvement. McNiff (1993) maintains that mutual and reciprocal transformation occurs between people and their workplaces, justifying the idea of a transformed individual in interaction with a transformed environment:

As a group, we have realised that we can work together and accomplish goals that can benefit our school. … we [usually] are so wrapped up in our own ‘cocoons’ that we cannot think out of the box. We looked for help from all corners and found that there are many companies, people, parents and
even political office bearers who are ever willing to assist ... all that was needed was for us to ask for help.

We learnt that we have to continue to cultivate a climate where respect and responsibility are lived out – perhaps punishment is not the best method for a lasting solution to this problem (late-coming). Learners would benefit more by learning how to solve problems, take responsibility and have respect for the needs of others. Action research provides us with the tool to take this issue further – it opens up the real reasons for problems so that workable solutions can be found.

The process of action research calls for self-directed and lifelong learning, which means that change is more likely to be sustainable and effective in contexts where the environment presents severe social and economic challenges (Zuber-Skerritt, forthcoming:2). Conventional approaches to improve the functioning of schools may not be effective in these cases.

They need to be supplemented with human initiatives, creative innovations and prompt action, all based on values that are grounded in pursuit of the common good through principles upholding non-hierarchical and democratic processes, and a shared commitment to helping others ... these strategies need to proceed from recognition that people on the ground are invaluable sources of local knowledge, wisdom and insight, which should be called upon for problem solving and new knowledge creation (Zuber-Skerritt, 2012:2).

The reports and responses of the leaders seemed to indicate that they understood this message. However, this is not to say that they did not find action research to be challenging.
5.2.3 Theme 3: Action research is a challenging process

The participants were honest about the challenges they faced in implementing their action research projects. They identified several factors, such as a shortage or deficit of time, resources, collaboration, commitment, and work overload. However, they also indicated that following reflection on these challenges, they became empowered to identify ways to overcome them.

5.2.3.1 Lack of time

Several of the participating school leaders stated that the action research project necessitated extra meetings with the staff. They indicated that they had to in a way “fit in” time for the project, while they still had to perform their administrative and extra-mural duties. As one participant said:

*Time management – We had to find time to do this project among our normal teaching, administrative and extra-mural duties. Nothing can, however, be achieved without sacrifice.*

Another participant shared a similar sentiment, stating that because of the low teaching morale, it was extremely difficult to add the project to the school’s agenda, as staff members were disinterested and would instead just concentrate on their primary task, namely teaching. The participant remarked as follows:

*The timing. Morale in teaching is at a low. Teachers do not want to be bothered with meeting. The attitude is that you must just do your work. There will always be institutional difficulties that are peculiar too every institution. These are just challenges that need to be dealt with.*

Literature confirms that, as in numerous other kinds of school improvement efforts, educators who try to utilise action research effectively will experience several obstacles
to change (Calhoun (2002), cited by Schmuck (2009:107)). They may experience difficulties in setting time aside for staff members to work together collaboratively, or it may also be a challenge to support those staff members who are ready to initiate such efforts and to advance staff leadership capacity at the same time (Calhoun (2002), cited by Schmuck (2009:107)). The first statement illustrates that the participants had to make time for staff meetings in their schedules. The participants stated that they realised that in order to make a success of the project, they had to demonstrate their eagerness to sacrifice their time. The second statement indicates that some educators may have displayed a disinterest because they preferred to focus on their principal task of teaching and may have regarded the project as an additional burden.

5.2.3.2 Lack of resources and influence of external factors

Some of the participants stated that they experienced a shortage of resources, such as finances and finding venues for the practical implementation of the project. In addition, some of them stated that certain external factors in the macro environment such as the educator strike and the extended holiday during the hosting of the World Cup, had impacted negatively on their teaching time. The duration of the educator strike was three weeks, which made it very difficult for the participants even to attend the formal sessions at the University. To make up for the lost teaching time, some participants indicated that their school day had been extended. Therefore, some participants became distracted from the project as they were now more concerned about the completion of the curriculum with their classes.

However, most of the participants managed to overcome these barriers and did complete their projects and were motivated to find ways to overcome challenges.

We encountered many problems in our implementation, which meant that only one of our attempts was successful, namely the beading workshop. We will now have to readdress some of the barriers such as finding
appropriate venues, involving more community members, and finding some start up finance and/or equipment.

Literature confirms that educators who work in “supportive environments” could achieve higher levels of development (King, 2011:151). Successful leaders are described by King (2011:151) as those who can discuss and encourage the professional development of educators by means of allowing time and resources. By providing time for educators, school leaders would in return be rewarded by educators who will feel that what they are doing is being valued (King, 2011:151). Support from the leadership could also take the form of being flexible and adaptable (Clausen et al. 2009:445) in terms of the daily or weekly time-table. School leaders should try to adapt to “flexi-time”, which should be built into their time-tabling. For example, adjustments should be made to the time-table to accommodate the additional meetings that have to be convened because of the changes that are being implemented (Clausen et al., 2009:447). It appears from the statements made by the participants that at some of the schools, leadership support was lacking in terms of adjusting the normal time-table to show that they value the educators who chose to work on the project. This could be the reason why a couple of participants felt that the project was an added burden to them as they were still expected to perform their normal duties, including extra-mural duties.

5.2.3.3 Lack of collaboration

Several participants stated that they found the project cumbersome in the sense that interest in the form of participation from staff to effect change was difficult to attain. As one pointed out: “Schools as an institution have become too cumbersome and laden with issues, to the extent that staff is often in disarray, each doing his own thing, in a different direction.”

Another said:
It is difficult to use when members do not want to be involved in bringing change in the school.

One of the mentors stated that he struggled with a particular school, as the staff members were unwilling to commit themselves to the project. He said:

*I need to get the team involved again, I am looking at re-establishing the team.*

According to Engelbrecht et al. (2006:127), the task of the school leader and their staff members has become very strenuous. In addition, the demand for quality education for all highlights the importance of establishing collaborative partnerships in schools. These authors see collaborative partnerships as the linchpin of a democratic school community that espouses inclusion (Engelbrecht et al., 2006:127). Hence the need for educators to learn to work collectively with one another, so that they can learn from one another and seek to model the democratic values and principles that are contained in their policies and strategies and bring it to fruition in their classrooms and in their schools (Engelbrecht et al., 2006:127). Khoza (2007:25) states that: “one finger cannot pick up a grain”, highlighting the point that, collectively, much more can be achieved if leaders are inclined to espouse an interdependence rather than independence. This is rooted in African traditional leadership which prioritises consultation. Thereafter, the King summarises the situation, guided by the “collective wisdom” of the group (Khoza, 2007:25). The African custom where “counsellors” meet with the King, especially when thorny issues need to be discussed, was relevant to this study, where the school leaders made an attempt to consult with their staff. A particular school leader in this study acknowledged how valuable it was for school leaders to establish strong ties with their communities, especially the parents, emphasising that a collective could do and accomplish much more than an individual. He made the statement that participation, collaboration and cooperation was embedded in action research.
By strengthening community-school partnerships, we can achieve much more than we could on our own. Action research promotes this form of participative cooperation.

Therefore, it seems that, even although it was a difficult process to involve others, all the participants managed to do this in the end, as they were convinced that it was imperative to do so. They seemed to realise that working alone as leaders would not be as beneficial as working together as a team. Other research confirms that the process of working on an action research project encourages collaboration and team work:

.... The participants “grew to appreciate how their interrelatedness created a power greater than a sum of individual powers (Brydon-Miller et al. 2003:14)

The above quotation reinforces the fact that school leaders have to encourage collaboration, as it is very difficult for school leaders to work and lead their schools on their own. One participant, who had really struggled to involve his colleagues, changed his tactics and decided to involve the learners, guided in this decision by the values he had identified during the project:

I always believed a more structured team approach, involving more teachers, would be needed to attain success, but perhaps I have to give over more control to learners, thereby living out our value of inclusion and belief in the ability of learners.

In this regard, literature confirms that establishing collaborative partnerships involves a lot of effort and is continuously taxing (Hattori & Lapidus (2004:100)), cited by Piggot-Irvine (2011)). Authentic collaboration involves three categories, namely discussion, which entails setting the stage so that multiple views can be generated; involvement, which means requesting people to engage in planning, decision-making and assessment; and participation, which occurs when people are fully engaged in every
phase, such as planning, implementation and evaluation (Cardno, 1998:114). Action research is undergirded by participation, which yields both, autonomy and responsibility which is important in relation to the processes of action and reflection (Grundy, 1994:35). McMorland & Piggot-Irvine (2000) caution that collaboration can be either superficial or authentic. They state that true, authentic collaboration occurs at the stage of breaking away from one’s own perceptions and becoming sensitive to the perceptions of others (McMorland and Piggot-Irvine (2000) in Zuber-Skerritt, 2012). Many of the school leaders indicated that they had achieved true levels of collaboration, as the action research project had assisted them to understand not only their own beliefs, but to attempt to gain insights into the viewpoints of their colleagues.

One of the participants indicated that educators were sometimes reluctant to do the research as required by the project. They also failed to realise how much they could learn from the academics from the University:

_Educators sometimes forgot about importance of academia and the role it can play in tackling challenges confronting us. The action research required teachers to read and research, and some were reluctant to do this._

An important tenet of the participatory approach that has informed this research study, is to make a commitment to inquiry and gaining knowledge, with the objective to become involved in order to change not only one’s practice, but also to bring about knowledge transformation that will enhance the lives of especially the marginalised groups of people (Brown & Rodriguez, 2009:30). Action research, according to Kemmis and McTaggart (1988:22), has a dual role in that it is a process that can change the individual and it can also change the situation in which the research investigator is working.
One participant said that it was extremely difficult to work in a group, since the project required continuous evaluation and reflection, and it also appeared that some educators were not interested, therefore there was no “buy-in”.

*It was challenging, especially in a group. There seemed to be a lack of interest as a result of the continual checking to ascertain whether one was still in line with what one wished to happen.*

Another participant stated that staff members must be willing to commit themselves and accept responsibility and that there should also be shared goals, because action research was complicated to use without commitment from staff:

*It is difficult to use it when members do not want to be involved in bringing changes in the school. Members have to be committed first and take responsibility and also have one goal in mind.*

Collaboration is challenging, as some individuals may not be willing to commit themselves to participate in the democratic process or may even be unwilling to share power (Koirala-Azad and Fuentes, 2009:3). A few participants indicated that some staff members did not want to be involved with the project; however, some participants were willing to share power. One participant said:

*Given the chance people are willing to take responsibility for change. As a leader you have to give up some of the power to allow people to experiment about change and how they effectively can administer it. Ownership of programmes helps in the success of the programme. Action research allows for the ownership to be discussed and researched.*

Educators seem to be consistently under pressure due to their heavy workloads. They do not want to get involved with additional tasks, such as an action research project, as they also have to be involved in extra-mural activities. Several school leaders who
participated in this project expressed difficulties in this regard. Even to schedule a staff meeting was extremely difficult. They struggled to keep the interest and motivation of some staff members. One participant stated:

_It’s difficult to keep staff motivated. I am finding it difficult to get the whole staff together because staff is under a lot of pressure._

There are certain factors in schools that are real stumbling blocks in initiating school change (Calhoun (2002), cited by Schmuck (2009:100); Gordon (2008:99). One of these is the fact that educators just do not have the time to plan and to take care of change, because they are generally focused on their primary tasks, namely planning lessons and teaching. According to Gordon (2008:99), educators are to a great extent too busy with their main tasks, and are generally not interested in other kinds of projects, inclusive of joint efforts that would give rise to improvements. Gordon (2008:100) refers to educators as the “catalyst for change”. Schools are often viewed as centres of change. A number of participants at the different schools were very committed to continue with the project in spite of the fact that some of their colleagues lacked interest. By doing so, they served as the impetus for change and would hopefully inspire more of their colleagues to join the project. However, in lots of schools, educators are just not included in planning, creating or even spearheading school refinement drives (Gordon, 2008:100). Generally, action research has its own challenges and intricacies and is messy, because the school climate can be “turbulent” (Pine, 2009:xii).

Grudens-Schuck (2004:5) states that educators in other parts of the world are also using action research to find solutions to the myriad of problems they encounter in their classrooms and schools. She affirms the fact that educators are not alone in using action research. They are using action research in spite of their heavy workloads and uninterested colleagues. As a matter of fact, they are utilising action research in order to find solutions to the very problems produced or engendered by unsatisfactory workloads, strained relations with colleagues, as well as other difficulties.
One participant shared his view regarding resistance from colleagues with the group, emphasising that one should stand one’s ground. He stated that if colleagues were negative about the project, this should be seen as a motivator to persist. He said: “If people are resistant to your project you develop a thick skin.”

Indeed, it appears that the challenges encountered, only served to increase the determination of the participants to persevere.

### 5.2.3.4 Reflection on challenges leads to improvement

The process of action research involves continual reflection, which includes reflection on what did not work, and why (McNiff & Whitehead, 2006). Therefore, although challenges were identified, the participants could find ways to minimise them through first reflecting, and then taking action.

As one participant said:

> I have learnt that as a coping mechanism we tend to put things in boxes. And I will not open my box for you … that is how we cope with problems. I think now we must actually have one box and we must all protect what we put in, so that we must protect each other, work together, instead of putting our boxes away to deal with another time.

The reports (see Appendix E) serve as evidence that barriers were able to be overcome and the accounts of their learning indicate that the participants learnt from the challenges they faced. Research confirms that it is extremely important for school leaders to realise the importance of reflection, as well as reflexivity, as reflexivity entails re-examining assumptions that are the basis of their practices (McNiff & Whitehead, 2010:22). McNiff and Whitehead (2010:22) make it explicit that an investigation needs to be opened up and that matters cannot just be accepted at “face value”.
This reflexivity of a statement is in line with the idea that school leaders as practitioners are also agents who are capable of thinking for themselves and making decisions for themselves (McNiff & Whitehead, 2006:29). The task of an agent is to pose questions, to reject self-satisfaction and the existing state of affairs and having no final answers (McNiff & Whitehead, 2006:30). When people become reflexive, they can become the architects of their own destiny (Batagiannis, 2007). Therefore, school leaders are required not only to reflect, but also to become reflexive.

In a similar vein, Winter (1989:42) talks about the “reflexivity of a statement”, implying that a research stance should undergo a rigorous process of questioning. The process of questioning a claim is to ask questions and more questions (Winter, 1989). He asserts further that the dialectical critique is also crucial, because it involves the critique of certain phenomena (Winter, 1989:52). This is what school leaders should embody, and what was encouraged during the action research sessions with them. In these sessions certain qualities that are linked to “servant leadership” (Crippen, 2004) as well as transformational leadership, namely to be authentic and to be receptive and open to criticism (Cerit, 2009:607) were modelled by the facilitator.

The participants stated that it was very beneficial for them to work with the mentors because they received support and simultaneously the mentors facilitated continual reflection on the project:

One participant found working with the other participants to be beneficial:

We have learnt to work together as a team. Also, by attending the action research sessions, we met educators from other schools and learnt to listen to each others’ concerns, difficulties, failures and achievements. This enabled us both to learn and to offer help where we could.

The mentoring process was also considered to be very encouraging:
Generally, our interaction with the mentor has improved our confidence. However, this project has been hard, but as we have been working we find we are getting better. Also, the other teachers have become more interested and helpful, though we have felt alone at times, especially with the work on the report: doing this report, it has been useful having the mentoring process, so we can say what we feel, and it captured in writing. This process has increased our eagerness to learn to write reports.

Through the establishment of such collective practices, I am claiming that the school leaders were empowered to transform their practices in order to improve their leadership and consequently the general functioning of their school. In this regard, it is evident that leadership plays a crucial role in encouraging collaboration between educators by developing collegiality which is founded on trust and respect and in which all members as well as their contributions are regarded as equal (King, 2011:150). Leadership is also required in the generation of learning climates, in which educators are afforded the chance to work jointly with a facilitator and to participate in the establishment of a professional community of practice. These communities of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991) highlight the seriousness of joint work that emphasises shared goals and “reflective professional inquiry”, which could culminate in increased educator autonomy and increased ownership relating to improving school functioning (King, 2011:150). The literature is full of the potential of professional communities of practice, but in spite of this, King (2011:150) notes that they are not widespread in many schools. The statements and remarks from the participants prove that the project ultimately culminated in real learning communities, since most of the participants worked for an extended period of time with the mentors, with a minimum of two members in the team. In addition, they attended the formal sessions at the University on a monthly (sometimes twice a month) basis, during which collaborative learning took place. Support from the leadership of the school should be in the form of setting time aside for collaboration so that educators could plan and reflect critically on their practices and to strengthen their own learning. Investing in trusting staff members will assist in creating as well as maintaining communities of practice (King, 2011:150).
This action research project can therefore be seen as a form of “developmental action research” because of the groups of participating school leaders who felt strongly that a certain situation should be addressed to bring about positive transformation (Cardno, 2006:467). They were so motivated that they were willing to devote their time and their energy to not only studying this situation, but also to improve it (Cardno, 2006:467). One of the mentors raised an important point at one of the sessions: “The development of schools is the responsibility of schools”, implying that the onus is on school leaders to lead development and growth. As Stenhouse (1976:222-223) confirms in Grundy (1994:35-36), schools should be transformed into institutions that are studied by the leaders and educators themselves:

…. Only as schools come to see themselves as research and development institutions rather than clients of research and development ….Research in curriculum and teaching, which involves the close study of schools and classrooms, is the basis of sound development, and the growth of a research tradition in the schools is its foundation …. It is not enough that teachers’ work should be studied: they need to study it themselves.

5.3 CONCLUSION

In Chapter Five, the three themes that emerged from the interviews, field notes and the participant reports were presented. These were discussed and supported with pertinent direct quotations from the participants and the appropriate literature. Chapter Six will present the research conclusions and recommendations, gleaned from the findings of this research study.
CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF STUDY

6.1 INTRODUCTION

Chapter Six begins with a general overview of the research study in order to verify that the purposes of the study communicated in Chapter One have been attained. I will then present some conclusions, based on the findings, in answer to the research questions. Finally, some recommendations will be made for further research and for future practice around the use of action research in developing school leaders.

6.2 PURPOSE OF STUDY

A brief outline of the purpose of this study will now be provided.

6.2.1 Problem statement

School leaders of schools that were previously disadvantaged face many problems in their efforts to lead and improve their schools. Most schools are poorly resourced and impacted by social problems, and the Department of Education is not in a position to provide the support needed. Most school leaders have not received any training in how to lead or improve their schools; therefore, unless school leaders learn how to address and improve conditions, schools and education in these schools will not be likely to improve. There is therefore a need to explore ways in which school leaders can be helped to take initiative and action to improve the functioning of their schools.
6.2.2 Purpose of research

Based on the above problem statement, the purpose of this research was to explore how school leaders can be assisted in addressing issues that impact negatively on the functioning of their schools, by adopting an action research approach.

This study aimed to describe and explain the Action Research (AR) process as experienced by school leaders in order to ascertain the usefulness of action research as a tool to help school leadership tackle problematic issues at their schools.

6.2.3 Objectives of research

Derived from the purpose, the objectives of the research were:

- To describe and explain the process of action research (AR) as implemented by the school leaders involved.
- To explore and describe the experiences of school leaders as they implement this process.
- To explore the usefulness of this approach to help school leaders take action to address issues that impact negatively on school functioning.
- Based on the findings of the qualitative investigation, to make recommendations as to how best action research (AR) can be used as a tool for helping school leaders to address issues that impinge on school functioning.

6.2.4 Main research question

What are the potential benefits of an action research approach to improving school functioning?
6.2.4.1 Secondary research questions

- What are the experiences of school leaders as they implement an action research project to address an issue that is negatively impacting on school functioning?

- What are the challenges facing school leaders in the implementation of an action research approach to addressing problematic issues in their school?

- What recommendations can be made with regard to the use of action research as a tool for assisting school leaders in addressing issues that impact negatively on school functioning?

6.3 SUMMARY OF CHAPTERS

I will now present a short summary of the main aspects of each chapter.

**Chapter One** encompassed a general overview of the study. It presented the background to the study, the problem statement, the objectives of the study, a clarification of concepts, the research design, as well as an outline of the ethical considerations taken.

**Chapter Two** comprised a literature review about some of the multiple challenges confronting school leadership in South Africa. The theoretical framework of transformational leadership, including the rationale for choosing transformational leadership as was appropriate in respect of the current conditions in education in South Africa, were presented.

**Chapter Three** consisted of a detailed theoretical explication of the qualitative research design chosen to conduct the study. The choice of methodological tools was justified
and described, and measures taken to confirm trustworthiness and compliance with ethical considerations were detailed.

**Chapter Four** incorporated a theoretical justification and explanation of the principles and values underpinning action research. A detailed explanation was given of the process of the project as experienced by the participating school leaders.

**Chapter Five** presented the findings of the study regarding the themes and sub-themes, substantiated by quotations from the participating school leaders and mentors, and controlled against relevant literature.

### 6.4 CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATION OF RESULTS OF STUDY

The findings of the study are based on the fieldwork conducted by the school leaders at the nine participating schools, as well as the formal action research sessions held at the University, which were attended by several of the participants. During these formal sessions, and also during my visits to the respective schools, field notes were generated. In addition, interviews were conducted and participants presented their findings and experiences of the process in written reports. They also presented an account of their learning at the conference which was attended by parents, community members and academics.

The primary aim of this research study was to describe and explain the Action Research (AR) process as experienced by school leaders in order to ascertain the usefulness of action research as a tool to help school leadership tackle problematic issues at their schools. The primary research question therefore was: “What are the potential benefits of an action research approach to improving school functioning?”

The primary objective has been achieved and the following conclusions can be inferred from the data analysis as indicated below:
6.4.1 Conclusions in support of primary aim of study

The focus of the study was the experiences of school leaders regarding the implementation of the action research process as they investigated an issue that they believed required improvement.

From the data analysis, it may be concluded as follows:

THEME 1: SCHOOL LEADERS EXPERIENCE ACTION RESEARCH AS A TRANSFORMATIVE PROCESS

The participants revealed that they experienced the action research process as being transformative.

Sub-theme 1: Transformation in thinking

It may be concluded that the participants found the project to be transformative in respect of their thinking in the following ways:

- They became more critical in their thinking and began to reflect on a regular basis on their own learning and actions.
- They experienced a rise in consciousness regarding the nature of the problems they had chosen to address. They became aware of the complexity and contextual aspects of issues.
- They became more solution orientated, rather than problem-focused.
- They were encouraged to reflect on their own beliefs and thoughts and adjust these to be more in line with the principles and values of action research.
Sub-theme 2: Transformation in leadership practices

It may be concluded that their participation in the action research project influenced the leadership of the school leaders in the following ways:

- Regular reflection became an integral part of their leadership practices.
- The systematic process of action research helped them to address problems that they had previously thought were unable to be improved.
- They have begun to realise the importance of shared leadership and of developing leadership in others. The values of participation, democracy and collaboration became embodied in their leadership practices.
- They acknowledged the significance of personal development for their leadership and they realised that they could also learn from their colleagues.

Sub-theme 3: Transformation on a personal level

Most of the school leaders revealed that the action research process had brought about personal as well as professional transformation. The following may be concluded:

- Participants not only learnt about the issues that they chose to address, but also about themselves as they reflected on their own values, goals, desires, wishes and leadership styles.
- Participants realised that the learning which took place on a professional level could also be transferred to their personal lives.
- Their level of intrinsic motivation increased, as they began to find more satisfaction in their professional lives, which benefitted them also on a personal level.
- School leaders thought that they had gained knowledge and claimed that the project helped in their personal and professional growth and development
- Participants began to regard themselves as researchers, capable of making a difference in their schools on an ongoing basis.
THEME 2: ACTION RESEARCH CONTRIBUTES TO TRANSFORMATION IN SCHOOL

All the school leaders confirmed that the action research project had resulted in positive changes in their schools and that the project had helped to make a practical difference.

Sub-theme 1: Improves the climate of the school

It may be concluded that the participants experienced participation in the project as:

- useful for fostering participation and engagement with colleagues and parents, which in turn improved the psychosocial and emotional climate of the school;
- a source of inspiration, as they became more enthusiastic and encouraged by the realisation that they could influence colleagues, learners, parents and the community by their actions in a positive manner;
- having an influence on the promotion of the quality of teaching and learning, as the climate in their schools had become more conducive to teaching and learning. The collaboration around the project had increased the self-confidence of educators, learners and parents and improved discipline and the general climate;
- impacting positively on the values lived out in the school. The project required that the school leaders identify values in a collaborative way and use them as standards of judgement to validate their actions and decisions. The values of participation, collaboration, inclusion, commitment, accountability and responsibility were reflected in the climate of the school.

Sub-theme 2: Action research makes a practical difference

The school leaders indicated that the project had helped to make a practical difference in their schools. It may be concluded that:
• The participants valued the systematic action research process as a way of improving problematic circumstances in their schools.
• The process of action research helped them to address issues that had eluded resolution in the past.

THEME 3: ACTION RESEARCH IS A CHALLENGING PROCESS

It may be concluded that, although perceived as beneficial in many aspects, the participants were challenged by the process of action research for several reasons. The following conclusions may be drawn:

• The issue of finding time to attend sessions and to identify and implement a project was experienced as challenging by participants.
• In cases where participants did not succeed in engaging colleagues fully in the project, implementation was experienced as more stressful and time consuming.
• Lack of financial and human resources presented initial barriers to the implementation of the project.
• External factors outside the control of the participants (e.g. strikes) increased the pressure for completion of the project.

However, the following may also be concluded:

• The challenges experienced, helped to unleash the creativity and resourcefulness of the participants and their colleagues as they were forced to find ways to overcome the barriers.
• Critical reflection on values helped them to focus on the positive aspects of the issues, rather than be problem focused.

Based on the findings of this study, it may therefore be concluded that the research questions can be answered as follows:
Main research question “What are the potential benefits of an action research approach to improving school functioning?”

The findings appear to suggest that the benefits of an action research approach to improving school functioning are as follows:

- It brings about transformation in school leaders on personal and professional levels.
- It improves the socio-emotional climate of schools.
- It assists in improving practical circumstances that impact on the quality of teaching and learning.
- The process of critical reflection encourages creative problem solving, allowing challenges to be overcome and is regarded as a learning experience rather than a barrier.

Sub-research questions:

“What are the experiences of school leaders as they implement an action research project to address an issue that is negatively impacting on school functioning?”

The findings seem to demonstrate that the experiences of an action research project to address an issue that is negatively impacting on school functioning are as follows:

- The participants experienced the action research project as a means of addressing and improving problematic situations in their schools in a practical manner.
- It was a positive experience, as they became more knowledgeable and it also helped with their personal and professional learning and development.

“What are the challenges facing school leaders in the implementation of an action research approach to addressing problematic issues in their school?”
The findings appear to show that the challenges of an action research approach to addressing problematic issues in schools are as follows:

- Time has been identified as a major challenge in terms of attending sessions.
- Insufficient collaboration and participation by all colleagues complicated the implementation of the project.

6.5 **RECOMMENDATIONS**

A secondary aim of this study was to make recommendations regarding the use of action research as a tool for assisting school leaders in addressing issues that impact negatively on the functioning of their schools.

“What recommendations can be made with regard to the use of action research as a tool for assisting school leaders to address issues that impact negatively on school functioning?”

The following recommendations are presented to build on the body of knowledge of this study, gleaned from the conclusions.

6.5.1 **Recommendations for professional development**

It is recommended that:

- Action research be used as a model for professional development of school leaders and for the improvement of whole school functioning.
6.5.2 **Recommendations for school leader preparation programmes**

It is recommended that:

- Action research be incorporated into all programmes that are aimed at preparing school leaders.
- Universities partner with school leaders in the implementation of action research projects to improve the overall functioning of schools.
- Awareness be raised of the benefits of creating learning communities in schools where groups of educators can work on various projects in terms of addressing issues of concern to them. This will encourage full participation by all staff members, which could lead to a better understanding of the viewpoints of other staff members.

6.5.3 **Recommendations for further research**

It is recommended that:

- Similar studies be conducted with more schools in different areas to ascertain if the findings of this study hold true for other contexts.

6.6 **LIMITATIONS OF STUDY**

This study has been limited to the participating school leaders who were involved with a specific project designed at improving school functioning; therefore, the aim was not to generalise the findings. It was therefore restricted to the small number of schools who were invited to be part of the project. This is also in accord with qualitative research, which requires small samples, because the emphasis is on depth. I therefore deemed this approach as most appropriate for this study, as my aim was to explore the real
experiences and challenges of school leaders with regard to the action research and ultimately to establish if the project was in any way beneficial to them.

6.7 CONCLUSION

This chapter outlined the main conclusions and recommendations arising from the findings of the study. This project has convinced me that, by bringing school leaders together, a transformative space can be created to improve their capacity to transform and improve their schools. It became evident to me that, when leaders begin to live out the values and principles on which action research is based, and follow the systemic process it provides, transformation is enhanced. Participation in the group sessions allowed the school leaders to collectively reflect on their progress. They found this to be an empowering learning experience. The findings of the study indicate that, when given the opportunity and initial support and structure, school leaders are perfectly capable of bringing about positive change, in spite of the adverse socio-economic contexts in which they may find themselves.

I therefore conclude that I have presented sufficient evidence in this dissertation to demonstrate the usefulness of action research for helping school leaders. I therefore present this account as a valuable contribution to the field of school leadership.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


ANNEXURE A: APPROVAL OF ETHICS COMMITTEE

APPLICATION FOR APPROVAL: NMMU RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (HUMAN)

1. Any project in which humans are the subjects of research, hereafter called a study, requires completion of this form and submission for approval to the RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (HUMAN) (REC-H).

2. The faculty through the Faculty RTI Committee and Head of Department (or other intra-faculty academic unit) should approve research proposals before submission to the Ethics Committee.

3. Each faculty has the primary responsibility for ensuring that human subjects used in research in their faculties are protected adequately by the application of the appropriate code applicable to the relevant profession.

4. How to proceed: i) Read the Code of Conduct for Researchers at the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University, available on the Intranet [Official Stuff | Policies | Official NMMU Policies | RTI | Research Ethics]. ii) Open a copy of the application form (this file “REC-H Human Ethics Application Form.doc”) from the Intranet, and “Save as” the file with a filename containing your name (e.g. “J Smith REC-H Human Ethics Application Form.doc”). iii) Complete Sections 1 to 8 in “hypertext” (Tab between fields, select from pull-downs, information may be pasted from existing Word® documents), and save [ensuring the filename contains your name]. iv) Append the necessary Information, e.g. an informed Consent form (use Document D/497/05 “REC-H Informed Consent Pro-forma” as a basis, and modify to suit your requirements). v) Email the files to Vickie-Coopasamy@nmmu.ac.za.

5. Print the document, get each page initialed on the lower right hand corner and get Sections 9 and 10 signed by the relevant parties.

6. Hand the signed hardcopy and attachments in at the Department of Research Capacity Development.

1. GENERAL PARTICULARS

a) Concise descriptive title of study (must contain key words that best describe the study):
   Action research for school improvement

b) Name of primary responsible person (PRP) (must be member of permanent staff):
   Prof L A Wood 06-00-15

c) Contact numbers of PRP: 5042834: 0822969202

d) Affiliation of PRP: Faculty Education, Department (or equivalent): Educational Psychology

e) Name and affiliation of principal investigator (PI) / researcher (may be same as PRP):
   Prof L A Wood Gender: Female

f) Name(s) and affiliation(s) of all co workers (e.g. co-investigator / assistant researchers / supervisor / co-supervisor / promoter / co-promoter):
   This study is part of a larger project headed by Prof P Webb - at this stage other participants have not been identified but students may be added later

g) Scope of study: Local  
h) If for degree purposes: Not for Degree

i) Funding: Other (Specifics follow)
   Additional information (e.g. source of funds or how combined funding is split): DG Murray trust

j) Are there any restrictions or conditions attached to publication and/or presentation of the study results? NO
   If YES, elaborate. (Any restrictions or conditions contained in contracts must be made available to the Committee)

k) Date of commencement of study: November 2009  
   Anticipated duration of study: Feb 2011

l) Objectives of the study (the major objective(s) / Grand Tour questions are to be stated briefly and clearly):
   1. To develop capacity among school leaders to initiate and sustain school improvement.
   2. To guide principals/school leaders to identify areas for school improvement, to help them to plan interventions, to monitor and evaluate their interventions and to adapt them based on findings.
   3. To facilitate the dissemination of the projects to a wider educational audience

m) Background information: briefly (300 words or less) describe the scientific or field observations which have prompted the work. A few

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Form ref 22 Sep 06
REC/HEW
(no more than 5) key scientific references may be included:

Schools in historically disadvantaged areas are beset with social, educational, economical and structural problems. These problems are often so overwhelming that school leaders do not know how to begin to solve them. By participating in a process of Action Research it is hoped that leaders will develop the skills, attitudes and values that will enable them to take initiative to solve their own problems and improve the overall functioning of the school.

q) Briefly state the methodology (specifically the procedure in which human subjects will be participating) (the full protocol is to be included as Appendix 1):
I envisage using action research methodology to involve the participants at all stages of the programme design, implementation and evaluation. I will be conducting an action research study of the practitioner self-enquiry genre in how I facilitate this project and help school leaders to conduct their own short action research intervention on a chosen aspect that needs improvement in their schools.

r) State the minimum and maximum number of participants involved (Minimum number should reflect the number of participants necessary to make the study viable) Min: 10 Max: 30

2. RISKS AND BENEFITS OF THIS STUDY

a) Is there any risk of harm, embarrassment or offence, however slight or temporary, to the participant, third parties or to the community at large? NO
   If YES, state each risk, and for each risk state i) whether the risk is reversible, ii) whether there are alternative procedures available and iii) whether there are remedial measures available.

b) Has the person administering the project previous experience with the particular risk factors involved? YES
   If YES, please specify: I have conducted other AR studies with no risk factors apparent.

c) Are any benefits expected to accrue to the participant (e.g. improved health, mental state, financial etc.)? YES
   If YES, please specify the benefits: School leaders will develop skills that will help them to take action to address some of the issues impacting on the quality of education delivered at their schools; personal growth will be enhanced as a result of self-reflection, learning of skills and increase in motivation

d) Will you be using equipment of any sort? YES If YES, please specify: video and audio recording equipment

e) Will any article of property, personal or cultural be collected in the course of the project? NO
   If YES, please specify:

3. TARGET PARTICIPANT GROUP

a) If particular characteristics of any kind are required in the target group (e.g. age, cultural derivation, background, physical characteristics, disease status etc.) please specify:

b) Are participants drawn from NMU students? NO

If YES, please specify:

c) If participants are drawn from specific groups of NMU students, please specify:

d) Are participants drawn from a school population? YES If YES, please specify: School leaders from different schools

e) If participants are drawn from an institutional population (e.g. hospital, prison, mental institution), please specify:

f) If any records will be consulted for information, please specify the source of records:

g) Will each individual participant know his/her records are being consulted? NO
   If YES, state how these records will be obtained: not applicable

h) Are all participants over 21 years of age? YES If NO, state justification for inclusion of minors in study:
4. CONSENT OF PARTICIPANTS

a) Is consent to be given in writing? YES
   If YES, include the consent form with this application. (A pro-forma file "REC-H Informed Consent Pro-forma.doc" is available for your convenience. Modify it to suit your requirements, and attach as "Appendix 2").
   If NO, state reasons why written consent is not appropriate in this study.

b) Are any participant(s) subject to legal restrictions preventing them from giving effective informed consent? NO
   If YES, please justify.

c) Do any participant(s) operate in an institutional environment, which may cast doubt on the voluntary aspect of consent? NO
   If YES, state what special precautions will be taken to obtain a legally effective informed consent;

d) Will participants receive remuneration for their participation? NO If YES, justify and state on what basis the remuneration is calculated, and how the veracity of the information can be guaranteed.

e) Do you require consent of an institutional authority for this study? NO If YES, specify:

5. INFORMATION TO PARTICIPANTS

a) What information will be offered to the participant before he/she consents to participate? (A pro-forma file "REC-H Preamble Letter Pro-forma.doc" is available for your convenience. Modify it to suit your requirements, and attach as "Appendix 2"). Attach any oral [Appendix 3] information given

b) Who will provide this information to the participant? (Give name and role)
   Prof L A Wood PI If "Other", please specify.

c) Will the information provided be complete and accurate? YES If NO, describe the nature and extent of the deception involved and explain the rationale for the necessity of this deception below.

6. PRIVACY, ANONYSTY AND CONFIDENTIALITY OF DATA

a) Will the participant be identified by name in your research? YES If YES, justify. This is an action research project and school leaders want to be identified by name for recognition of their achievements. In any publication, names and photos will only be used with prior permission in writing.

b) Are provisions made to protect participants’ rights to privacy and anonymity and to preserve confidentiality with respect to data? YES If NO, justify. If YES, specify. Written consent will be asked for.

c) If mechanical methods of observation are to be used (e.g. one-way mirrors, recordings, videos etc.), will participants’ consent to such methods be obtained? YES If NO, justify.

d) Will data collected be stored in any way? YES If YES, please specify: (i) By whom? (ii) How many copies? (iii) For how long? (iv) For what reasons? (v) How will participant’s anonymity be protected? By principle investigator for the duration of the project to enable the writing of a scientific article and to publish the findings in a booklet. Participants may request their names to be published but in their accounts no name of learners, colleagues, parents will be used.

e) Will stored data be made available for re-use? YES If YES, how will participant’s consent be obtained for such re-usage?

   Written consent waiver

f) Will any part of the project be conducted on private property (including shopping centres)? NO If YES, specify and state how consent of property owner is to be obtained:

g) Are there any contractual secrecy or confidentiality constraints on this data? NO If YES, specify:

7. FEEDBACK

a) Will feedback be given to participants? YES If YES, specify whether feedback will be written, oral or by other means and describe how this is to be given (e.g. to each individual immediately after participation, to each participant after the entire project is completed, to all participants in a group setting, etc.): At a colloquium

b) If you are working in a school or other institutional setting, will you be providing teachers, school authorities or equivalent a copy of
your results? Not Applicable If YES, specify, if NO, motivate: Participants accounts of their participation will be published in a booklet and made available to any educators who request it

8. **ETHICAL AND LEGAL ASPECTS**

a) The Declaration of Helsinki (2000) will be included in the references: **YES** If NO, motivate.

b) I would like the REC-H to take note of the following additional information:

9. **DECLARATION**

If any changes are made to the above arrangements or procedures, I will bring these to the attention of the Research Ethics Committee (Human).
I have read, understood and will comply with the “Guidelines for Ethical Conduct in Research and Education at the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University and have taken cognisance of the availability (on-line) of the Medical Research Council Guidelines on Ethics for Research.
All participants are aware of any potential health hazards or risks associated with this study.

I **AM NOT** aware of potential conflict(s) of interest which should be considered by the Committee.
If affirmative, specify:

04 April 2012

SIGNATURE: Prof L A Wood (Primary Responsible Person) Date

04 April 2012

SIGNATURE: Prof L A Wood (Principal Investigator/Researcher) Date

10. **SCRUTINY BY FACULTY AND INTRA-FACULTY ACADEMIC UNIT**

This study has been discussed, and is supported, at Faculty and Departmental (or equivalent) level. This is attested to by the signature below of a Faculty (e.g. RTI) and Departmental (e.g. HoD) representative, neither of whom may be a previous signatory.

<table>
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<th>NAME and CAPACITY (e.g. HoD)</th>
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<th>NAME and CAPACITY (e.g. Chair: FacRTI)</th>
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11. **APPENDICES**

In order to expedite the processing of this application, please ensure that all the required information, as specified below, is attached to your application.

**APPENDIX 1: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

Attach the full protocol and methodology to this application, as "Appendix 1".

**APPENDIX 2: INFORMED CONSENT FORM**

A pro-forma file "REC-H Informed Consent Pro-forma" is available for your convenience. Modify it to suit your requirements, and attach as "Appendix 2". If no written consent is required, motivate at 4a)

**APPENDIX 3: WRITTEN INFORMATION GIVEN TO PARTICIPANT PRIOR TO PARTICIPATION**

A pro-forma file "REC-H Preamble Letter Pro-forma.doc" is available for your convenience. Modify it to suit your requirements, and attach as "Appendix 3"
APPENDIX 4: ORAL INFORMATION GIVEN TO PARTICIPANT PRIOR TO PARTICIPATION

If applicable, attach the required information to your application, as "Appendix 4".

In order to facilitate improvements in efficacy/ease of use, feedback via a REC-H committee member will be appreciated.
Dear Sir/Madam

I am presently a part-time student first-year M.Ed student at Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University, doing full research under supervision of Prof. Lesley Wood.

You are kindly requested to participate in this research study. Your anonymity will be assured at all times.

You will be requested to give written informed consent to participate by signing and dating a consent form.

B GOVENDER
MASTERS DEGREE STUDENT – NMMU

CONSENT FORM

I ………………………………………….. (Name of Educator)

Hereby give consent to be interviewed for the purpose of this study. I understand I may withdraw from the study at any time, my participation being purely on a voluntary basis. I am aware of the purpose of the research and how the findings will be disseminated.

Signed on this …………………………………. day of ……………………………………2010
at …………………………………. Signed ……………………………………………………………..
### Annexure C: Interview Schedule – 2011

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Day</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>School</th>
<th>Time</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>28 February</td>
<td>Gelvandale High</td>
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<tr>
<td>Thursday</td>
<td>03 March</td>
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<td>Sapphire Primary</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wednesday</td>
<td>23 March</td>
<td>Machieu Primary</td>
<td>14:00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thursday</td>
<td>24 March</td>
<td>St. James (R.C.) High</td>
<td>12:30</td>
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<tr>
<td>Monday</td>
<td>28 March</td>
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<td>Ikwezilihle Primary</td>
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<tr>
<td>Monday</td>
<td>06 June</td>
<td>Kama Primary</td>
<td>13:00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monday</td>
<td>06 June</td>
<td>Charles Duna Primary</td>
<td>14:00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuesday</td>
<td>14 June</td>
<td>Woolhope High</td>
<td>14:30</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ANEXURE D: AN EXAMPLE OF A TRANSCRIBED INTERVIEW

Interview Number 3 – St James Secondary School
Thursday 25 March 2011

Interviewer:

Okay the first question. How is participation in this project affected you personally in your capacity as a school leader?

Interviewee:

Mm its been a change for me its probably that being a grade 11 and that I’ve always purposefully avoided 8 to 9 simply because that in grades 8 and 9 it’s a bit more traumatic .. um with this very project. The project was only going to be on grade 8/9 and the reason for that is that we have teaching this class … department and and what differs is that is its something that is very uncomfortable, is that um … ne is that I have to change my appetite? I have to take personal … at school … and um professional and that you cannot do with 8 and 9 groups. So for me on a personal level I would say that brought a change in the person that comes on the school. Because now its something that um its something that could happen with grades 8 and 9 not really much… you really have to down … you really have to … personal thing.

Interviewer:

In terms of your school how would you say what would you say is there anything in the climate of the school or

Interviewee:
Look I don’t think we have the idea that um but for us its only one group not the whole school, um I think we are more .. I don’t we will make it now because I don’t think we did enough either but I think I did enough to regenerate interest especially amongst the grade 8 and I think I’m still working on the 9’s but at least now I get an idea, get an idea first of all there is the library, and the library is clean and we are busy with our noticeboard outside this office, ... the noticeboard generates interest. So tomorrow I’m supposed to pick up on the board um that I’m with you and the next they look at the board ..... Next week I will have levendal with her.... And that ... that creates more interest amongst the .. the whole school takes interest in grade 8 and grade 9 simply because they’ve had my personal contact.

**Interviewer:**

Okay, as your capacity as school head, I just want to come back to question 1, as a school leader what is your capacity if I may ask

**Interviewee:**

At the moment the current HOD of the senior program is ....

**Interviewer:**

Yes, okay, is there anything you can tell me how this affect you in your capacity as senior HOD by participating you know in this project.

**Interviewee:**

Um look you know what some days I regret the person ... some days you some days some days I look at grade 8a for example because 8a has all the ... for example. Um on a personal level ... I think it just opened my up more because ... till now at least its been a relationship with the grade 8s that I never had before and I think it make things a
bit easier in fact um … supervise them it makes it easier now just to work with them … much smaller which is different from your school and your school … acted like um … now I can have a relationship with them … and that is different from before it forced me to have a relationship with grades 8 and 9.

**Interviewer:**

Okay, the second question. In terms of the Action Research intervention, what are your impressions you know of action research as a methodology you know to improve your situation with school problems and any issues you have at school.

**Interviewee:**

But I think … look at the solution and the possibilities to the solution and I think that that you can only to as a principal for example if I was to if I was to look at the whole school … I would think in terms of human resource management you have to really select who you put where and what, you know. Um, in terms of in terms of raising literacy events I would say that this should not be the only factor you know and um as you know with some people it works with others not comfortable more that ….. I think the solution not the problem but I like the priority that it focuses our attention on the here and now and not the problem. So lets for the year and give it all we’ve got and solving literacy here is not the only solution.

**Interviewer:**

Okay would you say you can use it as a tool to to tackle the many problems you have faced with.

**Interviewee:**
I have to say you really have to know people from the ground up. Don’t give miss to the guy who that opportunism you know um. I feel you really be careful um you select the correct person for the job (interviewer mmmmming over interviewee) that person will do the job. I also think that this is something you need the principal support um you need you need the staff support. Which I tend to do in my ….

**Interviewer:**

Could you be a bit more specific there (laughter)

**Interviewee:**

Doubtful, um really doubtful. Having found ..... such a big problem because you need to find a date when everyone is there and from that date … people because they don’t want to be three hour long. So I … as principal find a date where the caz and that already is a big obstacle. Maybe ..... so at what I think .... Is that ... in the absence of a .... What that does is that it creates little pockets on your staff and little cliques that... look there are times when you can do that and when you can’t ... meeting ja. So the lack of staff involvement or possibly principal involvement comes with being principal comes from really an obstacle where in getting all of us together.

**Interviewer:**

So what do you say then so what do you find difficult about doing Action Research as a methodology.

**Interviewee:**

Its not a problem as a principal you I know how it operates in the school and with difficulty because I’m that kind of person. I hate democracy, democracy is burocracy because now you have to consider everyone’s point of view, dark was the times even
that were not informed in any case ... so I hated the fact that I had to ... staff and whatever and in the end I would feel like ... forthcoming and then in the end whatever in any case. Whatever the case may be I think improvement for me is people behaving entrusting me with their problems. But then again I'm ??? personality the person that ... refer to, ... some people ... think action research is the wrong term ..

**Interviewer:**

Why you say why you stay that why is it wrong

**Interviewee:**

You know if you do action research then probably you need to tell your staff .... You need to ... and nothing else

**Interviewer:**

You feel that they have to concentrate on a particular issue?

**Interviewee:**

Yes and yet that's all that you do and ... look at other issues like transport um you know. As soon as we do other things we dilute it and ..... away crumbs ..... people become .... So you do action research you must select the one topic you must in order to do ....

**Interviewer:**
Okay so what would you say what type of help would you need in terms of using the kind of methodology … to improve schools or your school.

**Interviewee:**

You know what I would like from you and from the university. I would like from this…. Not necessarily .. we …. Where we are now and whether to … but specifically for .. the teaching now that we have raised literacy you know … literacy. Actually for me this is a long term thing you know and we need like commitment from hereon or. With me …. Um Linton Grange had this book program some intermediate some literacy um we need to establish contract with some macro …. You know if we want to increase literacy and raise profile of literacy ….for one
Action Research for School Leaders

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DG Murray Integrated School Development & Improvement Project

Project Leader: Prof Lesley Wood
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Preface
Lesley Wood

Action Research for School Leaders

Schools require leaders that are capable of focusing on the development and maintenance of “structures and cultures” that will guarantee continuous refinement and success (Tucker & Codding, 2002:252). There is sufficient evidence to support the claim that successful schools are led by successful leaders (Taylor & Ryan, 2005; Van der Westhuizen & Van Vuuren, 2007). In fact, the most common denominator in weak schools is weak leadership (Taylor & Ryan, 2005).

Successful leaders provide benefits for educators, learners and the school (Darling-Hammond, Meyerson, LaPointe & Orr, 2010). Huffman and Hipp (2003) state explicitly that head educators who are capable of sharing power, allowing staff members to take part in decision-making, and who foster a common goal are more inclined to accomplish the results desired by the school.

Research thus confirms school leadership as the all-important element in schools that achieve outstanding outcomes (Darling-Hammond, et al., 2010). Research also relates schools who deliver excellent results to school leaders who take a proactive, hands-on approach to the running of their school (Darling-Hammond, et al., 2010). School leaders should have a dream that they are determined to realize, and that dream has to be conveyed to all stakeholders in their school. Constant improvement and striving towards excellence undergirds the actions of successful schools and school leaders (Taylor & Ryan, 2005).

This project aimed at helping school leaders to learn how to imagine and accomplish this dream through the adoption of an action research approach. Action research is an experiential or hands-on process that allows individuals to participate actively in bringing about positive change in matters that concern them (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Participative action research requires a partnership between all stakeholders, ensuring that multiple viewpoints are included to contribute towards overcoming barriers to advancing education (McGarvey, 2007).
The real and sustainable benefit of action research, however, lies in the fact that it ensures that people hold themselves accountable to values that they have identified as being important to guide their practice. These values derive from notions of democracy, equality, participation and enhancement of the quality of life (Stringer, 2007). It is our belief that, if we are serious about transforming and improving education, we cannot continue to play lip service to such transformative values. We need to find ways to embody these values in our everyday practices, so that our actions will be truly transformational for ourselves and others in our sphere of influence.

The participants in this project worked together with their school community to address the following questions (McNiff and Whitehead, 2006):

- What is our concern?
- Why are concerned about it?
- What can we do about it?
- How did we ensure that our conclusions are reasonably fair and accurate?
- How can we explain the potential significance of what we are doing?
- How should we modify our practice and ideas in light of our evaluation?

The school leaders did not work in isolation, since in action research it is important to remember that we are part of a system composed of multiple other ‘I’s’ and therefore need to create a shared understanding in our quest for improvement and learning. This ontological commitment opens the way for the realization of shared values at a personal level. Individuals can transform themselves by living out their values in their everyday interaction. The cumulative effect of this individual transformation in turn will change the culture of the whole school.

Based on this premise, we (myself, and the three mentors on the project) worked with school leaders to help them to operationalise the values of, inter alia, inclusion, people-centredness, democracy, social justice, compassion and respect as they strove to address specific issues that were impeding the delivery of quality education in their schools. Our role was merely to facilitate the process and challenge their thinking - they took full responsibility for the identification of an issue, deciding on how to address it, implementing the corrective action, evaluating the outcome and then reflecting on their learning throughout this process. Since the school leaders were able to
fully own the problems they identified, change was not imposed from without, but emanated from an internal epistemological and ontological shift. As Reason and Torbert (2001:1) state, transformation takes place when our usual ‘assumptions, strategies and habits are challenged’, and we would add that transformation is more profound when people challenge themselves, rather than being challenged by external agents.

The narrative accounts in this book do not reflect the full story. As interesting as they are, mere text cannot encapsulate the profound shifts that took place in the participants on a cognitive and affective level. The growth in passion, commitment, capacity for critical self-reflection and motivation were evident to us as the facilitating team. At our regular sessions we were amazed by the learning that was taking place and the passion with which the participating leaders took the projects forward. The mentors, who regularly visited the participants on site, have the following comments to make:

_The role of the mentor is to guide, support and assist the action research team at each school. However, the role of the mentor varies from school to school. In some cases the mentor is able to play a passive role by simply providing encouragement and acting as a sounding board, but letting the action research team get on with what they want to do, while in other cases the mentor has to play a more active role. In these cases, the mentor will provide much more guidance and support, sometimes in terms of providing information and new ideas, or by adopting a more structured approach, for example holding regular meetings to ensure that progress is made on the school’s project. The mentors also learn a lot from interacting with school action research teams. They soon become aware of the day to day challenges faced by teachers and schools and how little time teachers have available to take on additional responsibilities. The mentors also get to know the dynamics of the schools quite intimately._ (Viv England)

Brian Walter says the following:

_As with all mentoring, I have found the interaction with the schools allocated to me in the Action Research project a great learning experience._

_One school was special because mentoring was more of a “classic” example: that is, after a while, the school started to take the initiative, and the project focus grew from focussing on one aspect to discipline, to the creation of a more moral school climate. The school drew in, and used, other_
agencies, and used the momentum provided by the Action Research model to achieve effective, and visible, change in the school. What was heartening here was that Action Research was — as it should be — the change catalyst, and the mentor’s role became one of prodding, suggesting, helping with monitoring, and helping with the reflection in the important report writing process. Through the implementation, the team grew to include others, including the teachers in charge of school leaders, of a peace project, and also the parent who is employed as the care giver.

The importance of reflection, of collecting a sense of what has been achieved, and evaluating this, was evident during the latter stages of the action research project. The final stages of writing were effective “penny drop” moments, where mentor and members of the team could draw together the collective experience, and reflect on what had been, and what could have been, and what could still be, achieved.

Oral interviews with team members revealed the richness of the project, and the work done “behind the text” started to emerge. Report writing was a daunting task for nearly all the schools and this alerts us to the fact that we need to show, in some follow up work, how report writing can be a guiding, and enlightening, activity, done for the sake of the project itself. It need not be a threatening “research” activity, done for a judgemental “outside reader”.

In one school I mentored, it was proposed to the principal that each committee in the school should produce a short annual report, using the action research format, and modelled on this team’s experience. Thus, this action research committee became a trail-blazer.

Mentorship experiences – Randal Grebe:

Action Research is a process of learning, a learning experience for mentees, school management, the learner, parents, other stakeholders and especially for the mentors. Therefore, the process of learning is more important than the outcome.

There are the right things we do, but there are also many “wrongs’’. It is through the mistakes we make that we really learn and empower ourselves and others. It contributes to the improvement of the learning spiral, building good relationships and acquiring many values and skills. As a 'beginner mentor' I tried to focus on this process. This does not happen automatically. It is related to many factors----the context of the school, the communities, management and culture of the school, the personalities of the mentor and mentees and the nature of the problem addressed.
A very important part of the whole process is to have the commitment and 'buy-in' of senior management, especially the principal. Only two of the principals were personally involved in the schools I was mentoring. Principals tend to delegate responsibilities, which is not necessarily wrong, but when they show little active interest in the project and the development there-of, it becomes a major problem that can hamper the process. Therefore, the visible support and involvement of the principal contributes to the success of the process and eventually the research project. They must be informed of the progress and attend some of the scheduled meetings of the team of mentees and the mentor. Therefore, they should be actively involved, supportive, informed and consulted in all the phases of the process.

It is also important that the mentor acquaint him/herself with the school environment, activities, projects, the community and the learners. This helps to build a sound relationship with the staff (including the administration staff) and project mentees. The mentor should become one of the 'school family'.

The involvement of people and agencies outside the parameters of the school also contributed to the empowerment and motivation of the project team. In all the projects we managed to obtain the expertise and support of NGO's, people from other units in the University, parents and skilled, voluntary interested people.

We also had media coverage of a project that did not turn out to be as successful as we intended. We learned from this that involving the media should be managed with care, especially with sensitive problems in our communities and schools. Nevertheless it opened-up a dialogue amongst school leaders and the wider community on a very sensitive national problem relating to school learners in South Africa.

The process was not without challenges – 2010 was not a good year for education. First, there was the wonderful world cup that meant extended holidays, closely followed by the teachers' strike that shut down most of the schools in this project. When the strike ended, the priority for the schools was to make up for lost time, and so it is understandable that this project took a back seat at times. However, despite these challenges (not to mention the usual challenges of working in a disadvantaged educational system), nine schools present their accounts here as a testimony to their resilience and commitment to improving education.
The focus in the projects was not on classroom activity and learning *per se*, but on improving the many social factors that impinge on education in South Africa. The topics cover an interesting range of issues:

- Improving safety at school (Malabar and Kama)
- Addressing teenage pregnancy (Gelvandale)
- Trying to instil a culture of reading (St James)
- Reducing late-coming (Woolhope)
- Improving parental involvement (Dower)
- Extending participation in extra-mural activities (Sapphire)
- Providing skills development for children with barriers to learning (Machiu)
- Improving the moral climate of the school (Charles Duna)

The action research process undertaken to address these issues provided the school leaders with a systematic tool to guide their actions. It also helped them to live out the values that they wanted to cultivate in their schools and, by so doing, to influence the rest of the school community to adopt these values as their guiding principles.

The accounts in this book are valuable examples of how school leaders can take action to improve their schools. If other educationalists choose to take notice of the valuable lessons described here, then we have no doubt that education in South Africa can be improved from within. Change that emanates from taking control of our own situations is more likely to be lasting. Finally, schools who live out the values that underpin action research will contribute greatly to development of future citizens who will be able to contribute to the creation of a socially just society.

*Lesley Wood, Head, Action Research Unit*

*Viv England, Mentor*

*Randal Grebe, Mentor*

*Brian Walter, Mentor*
REFERENCES


REGENERATING MORAL VALUES IN THE
SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT

Charles Duna Primary School
Mr Hlulani, Ms Zweni, Mrs Ngumbela, Mrs Nombombo, Ms Sume and Mrs Krweqana (parent)

Our Context

Charles Duna Primary School is situated at Msimka Street, New Brighton. Established in 1962, it was, named after Mr. Charles Duna, who was a member of the Bantu Education School Board.

We have 1,010 learners, coming mostly from the neighbouring informal settlements of Chris Hani, Silver Town, Noxolo and Mandela Village. Poverty, unemployment (80% of our parents are unemployed), alcohol and drug abuse are all socio-economic issues that greatly impact on our school. There are six shebeens (unlicensed taverns) in the same street as the school. Our learners are exposed to sexual violence at an early age due to socio-economic circumstances, including lack of privacy. This violence impacts on morals and affects behaviour amongst learners. Incidents of promiscuity amongst learners have increased.

The school fees are R40 per annum, and less than 10% of learners qualify to pay (as per government policy that exempts learners from paying fees if they are recipients of government social grants, or are being raised by grandparents or guardians). Thus, a school can raise amounts of only R110, as we did this year. Thus, our income from low fees is further restricted by exemptions. We cannot operate on the fees alone. We are forced to undertake fundraising efforts.

Compounding our financial problems is the fact that the school has unfortunately been placed in Quintile 4 (same funding Category as the previously advantaged ex-model C schools). This means that, in terms of the government subsidy, we receive less funding from the Department of Education. We also then do not then qualify for the school nutrition programme. We are
continually scouting for food from NGO’s, the business sector or private individuals. On the positive side, the school is a tourism tea stop for Calabash Tours. This venture has helped in raising much needed funds.

Our staff complement is 40 permanent teachers including two Grade R practitioners, and fourteen staff members who joined us in 2009 to help with our large number of learners who encounter barriers to learning. Unfortunately we will be losing nine teachers through the current redeployment process, and this will have a negative impact on our remedial programme.

Our Concern

Our concern identified during this project was learner bullying and the need for discipline, in our school, with the basic question being “How can we improve discipline at our school?” Through the action research project, this question has broadened to encompass the question of values. Taking a more constructive approach, the project finally looked at “the regeneration of moral values in our school”.

The whole staff has been affected by the lack of discipline amongst the majority of our learners, and this is why the issue was raised in our early discussions. The following incidents are an indication of how have arrived at the realisation that there is a major need for intervention. Each teacher has an incident book register where they record learner transgressions. This has also been very helpful in helping us identify problematic behaviours.

Analyses of these incidence books and discussions with staff have revealed the following:

1. In our staff meetings every teacher has voiced frustration as learners were not doing homework.
2. Learners fought a lot, even in front of their teachers. This showed disrespect.
3. There were repeated incidences of late coming.
4. Learners swore openly in front of teachers.
5. Learners easily became aggressive with little provocation.
6. Learners disrupted classes while tuition was taking place.
7. Learners vandalised property by writing on walls and desks.
Other offenses included glue sniffing. For instance, on the 10/11/10 one of our Grade 5 pupils disturbed the class by stabbing another learner with a sharp object. The class teacher called him to the class and he refused to come into the classroom. This is one of many cases that have been reported with regards to the learner’s behaviour. A number of learners have also been caught in possession of illegal weapons, like knives and other sharp objects. Even although in all the cases we managed to catch them before they actually used the weapons, it still bothered us what they can do with the weapons, if not caught in time. These, and other incidents like smoking dagga, fighting, forcefully taking other’s property and using vulgar language, made us to want to do something about the problem.

More evidence for the problem comes from the reports of the school care-giver. The school has a care-giver, a parent who does home visits on behalf of the school at the homes of serial behavioural offenders. The care-giver confirms that social conditions at home are not conducive to shaping good behaviour. These visits and consultations confirmed the violent and dysfunctional environments that our learners come from. Some of the homes are not in a good state e.g. the child shares a one roomed shack with four or five siblings, the mother is unemployed and the father is not around. These are the kind of homes that many of our learners come from, and that is quite evident from the lack of involvement of the parent in the child’s education.

Generally, there is a lack of positive parenting, promotion of positive value systems and role-modelling. Major problems in this regard are unemployment, and the high alcohol consumption by parents. HIV/AIDS also plays a role, as infected parents may be too ill to discipline their children, while in some cases the parents have already died.

The majority of our parents are illiterate. Those that are employed often work as labourers. They leave their homes early and return very late in the evenings, leaving children unsupervised or in charge of siblings. When they come to school, these children tend to bully others. We link this to home environments that are often unsupervised. Another challenge is that the majority of our learners are living with extended families, who do not always invest much time in bringing up these children. As a result there are no clear communication lines and disciplinary procedures.
We concluded that the school should fill in these gaps in the children’s education. The school needs to provide a caring environment, better supervision, and clear communication lines and disciplinary procedures.

The above mentioned are the reasons that have convinced us that our school has discipline problems.

**Why are we concerned?**

We are concerned because when our learners misbehave that becomes a representation of what we are as a school and who they are as individuals. This contradicts the values that we would like our learners to adopt for their lives. To have a children being brought to the office because they misbehaved, or stabbed another child with a pair of scissors they are supposed to use to cut their paper with, undermines what we are about, and does not reflect the values that we embrace and cherish.

These values include respect for others and their property; responsibility for doing what they are supposed to be doing; accountability for their own behaviour; honesty and integrity. We want to practice what we preach and this is not only for the benefit of the school but also that of the community, as the learners are the future leaders of their communities. The major aim is to make our school a safe environment where our learners will thrive and grow into responsible and respectful citizens, who will respect not only themselves but their peers as well.

For this reason we were committed to trying to intervene to try and create a moral climate at school that would resonate with these values and encourage embodiment of them in learner and staff behaviour. Since learners are mostly exposed to values at home, we knew that it would be important to also involve parents in our project.

**Our Actions**

We decided that we would hold workshops on bullying and elicited the help of Childline, the Department of Social Development, and the General Motors Peace Project. We also included
workshops, whereby we teach parents about what it is to be a parent and how to inculcate good values in their children. The process of our actions is detailed in the following sections.

**Forming the Action Research Committee for the Project**

As a school, we have different committees that deal with different issues within the school premises. However, we did not have a committee that dealt with disciplinary issues. And thus at the beginning of 2009, we established the Action Research Committee, whereby we encouraged teachers who were interested to volunteer for the committee and that is basically how the committee was established. The fact that all staff members share these concerns has ensured “buy in” into the process. We worked with all the teachers that volunteered their services, and it was not difficult to get the teachers to buy into the project in that they all wanted to contribute a make a difference. The action research committee has grown as new components have been added to the project.

Knowing that discipline affects all the teachers, it was decided that all the teachers should come up with different strategies that can be used as corrective measures to the problems that were identified. As a result, we had different teachers coming up with different strategies and thus it was impossible to have universal agreement on strategies and that was one of the initial stumbling blocks for us. Adding to the problem of the committee was the time lost due the teachers strike and the long holidays for the World Cup. This meant that we tended to be more reactive than proactive in addressing the problems. In other words, we tended to focus on disciplinary measures, rather than focussing on how we could encourage learners to live out their values.

**Data gathering by means of questionnaires**

In order to find out more about the situation as a guideline on how to improve it, we compiled questionnaires, which were distributed to Grades 6 and 7 learners. The questionnaires were designed to assess the extent of bullying, fighting or other forms of violence on the school grounds or in the classrooms. The analysis of the questionnaires confirmed that 85 percent had been culprits or perpetrators of bullying. This confirmed to us that we would have to address bullying.

**Reviewing the Code of Conduct**
The school code of conduct was reviewed at a parents meeting. Each learner was then given a copy to read together with the parent, sign and bring back to school for filing. A3 size copies were then given to each class teacher to put up in class and continually discussed with learners. The aim of this intervention was to firstly get parents involved in deciding what behaviour is acceptable at school. Learners are then expected to sign and know they are accountable for their actions.

**School Leaders**

Each class elected two class leaders who form part of our school peer leaders to help with discipline during break time, when we have visitors, and during school functions. The choice of leaders ranges from assertive to troublesome learners (some suggest that this is a “put a thief to catch a thief” policy, but we view it as more creative – giving frustrated youngsters’ responsibility that they can grow with). The committee was responsible for the training of the school leaders, and introduction of the school leaders to the entire school during assembly. The initiative has worked in that the learners that previously misbehaved now model good behaviour, because they know that as leaders others learners are looking up to them. We believe that this is evidence that our use of peer leaders has encouraged respect and support from the other learners.

**Peace Education**

We have joined the G.M. Foundation’s Peace program. The following modules have been completed: peer mediation, feelings alphabet, getting a grip on anger, conflict resolution,
listening (3 ways), what are my limits and interacting with others. The program was attended by Ms Zweni who now runs the peace project and is also one of the members of the Committee and the Principal.

The main focus is on the teaching of values. We requested and received the Values Manifesto from the National Department of Education. We plan to involve all stakeholders in choosing values for our school.

We have included Peace Spaces in classrooms: these are classroom sanctuary spaces for learners to withdraw to in times of stress.

**Parenting Skills**

Three teachers attended the G.M Foundation parenting workshop. Two workshops have been given, firstly to parents of the serial offenders. Child Line has also come on board. They facilitated “circle time”, with learners first, then with parents per grade. The aim was to get people talking about their concerns or challenges. This became emotional as parents talked about domestic violence, their HIV status or economic challenges.

Out of the learner circle time, a new rape case was reported. The follow up workshops will be from Social Services as per the request of parents.

**Community Police Forum**

We have established a good working relationship with our New Brighton community police forum that come to our rescue whenever we need them, usually for parent warnings in the case of child neglect, vandalism and criminal behaviour of learners.
Health Advisory Committee (HAC)

We have established a Health Advisory Committee including a policeman, a nurse, a community member responsible for the initiation of young men, our garden representative, two learners and two teachers. Their function is to look into the wellbeing of learners, staff and parents. For discipline improvement, they are to organize talks for boys and girls separately where members of the community will address them. We hope to get our community involved in the shaping of future citizens. This committee is new, therefore they still have to organise and strategize their interventions.

Extra-mural Activities
The Umzingisi Foundation has been allocated ninety minutes on Tuesdays for the coaching of different sporting codes to our learners. We use the participation in this program as an incentive to well behaved learners. Life skill training is also offered by Grassroots soccer, Umzingisi and Love Life. Sport is an effective and enjoyable tool to teach team work, healthy competition and to release stress. Some learners have lost their innocence through rapes, being responsible from a young age, or taking care of ill parents. Playing gives them a chance to be children again.

Other extramural activities, initiated and run by staff, include the book club, gardening, and the mosaic workers.

*Promoting health through physical activity in schools*

This intervention, brought by NMMU Department of Human Movement Science through the DG Murray Project, will create a physical activity friendly environment. This will include some leadership training for school leaders. In this project, students from the University work with the school to put in place simple break-time activity centres and basic equipment, as well as simple play-equipment stored in class-rooms.

This is to encourage increased school-time physical activity. The school leaders help to monitor usage and behaviour. Earlier phases of this project monitored physical activity, which increased through the use of the equipment: increased physical activity has proven health and well-being benefits. Some of the equipment may be integrated into sports training.
Were our actions successful?

Although still in the early stages, we believe that we have managed to begin to inculcate more positive values in our school. The table below summarises what we did, how effective it was, and what we think we still have to do:

*Table 1: Summary of actions taken*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ACTIVITY</th>
<th>ACTION TAKEN</th>
<th>EVALUATION</th>
<th>LEARNING</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>REVIEWING CODE OF CONDUCT</td>
<td>The review and signing of the code of conduct</td>
<td>More learners know the contents of our code of conduct and parents have been involved in deciding on it.</td>
<td>There are some learners who did not bring back the form. We will have to follow this up.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SCHOOL LEADERS</td>
<td>Training and inauguration of leaders</td>
<td>Formerly disruptive learners are now acting responsibly and becoming good modellers of the values we wish to live by.</td>
<td>Some learners are still disrespecting school leaders and have received warnings from the principal. We acknowledge that changes to behaviour will take time. We will continue with the process.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PEER MEDIATION</td>
<td>Peer mediation</td>
<td>Noise has lessened as we encourage learners to speak softly</td>
<td>Vulgar language is still a problem and we have to find ways to promote more acceptable language.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Anger management</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Feelings alphabet</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PARENTING SKILLS</td>
<td>Workshops for parents</td>
<td>Parental involvement has improved. Parents have been exposed to alternative ways to discipline their children.</td>
<td>We now have 60 volunteers who clean classes daily – this is quite an achievement but we would also like to find ways to involve parents in more educative activities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COMMUNITY POLICE FORUM</td>
<td>Including a policeman in our HAC committee</td>
<td>The relationship has helped with speedy response to our cases We have called them to warn a parent who was neglecting her 5yr old boy. Police have started to address learners on crime, drugs and absenteeism</td>
<td>We need to include our policeman in prevention work and not just in punitive work.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EXTRA-MURAL ACTIVITIES</td>
<td>Umzingisi Foundation sporting activities.</td>
<td>There are happy sounds as the learners are playing They are now being introduced to Tennis and hockey. We are expecting a donation of +_R90 000 from Reeds College (UK) towards the development of a</td>
<td>Involving youth in positive activities is a natural way for them to learn pro-social values.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACTIVITY</td>
<td>ACTION TAKEN</td>
<td>EVALUATION</td>
<td>LEARNING</td>
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<tr>
<td>SKILLS TRAINING</td>
<td>We have revived our skills training this year. Learners are doing beading, sewing, mosaic and decoupage on Wednesdays from 14h00 to 15h00</td>
<td>The focus is learners with academic challenges but it does not exclude interested learners.</td>
<td>Giving learners something useful to do increases their self-esteem and this leads to better behaviour.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Rewarding and encouraging good behaviour: Awards Ceremony at Nangoza Jebe Hall, 2010**

**What have we learned that will influence our future practices?**

We are now developing a measuring or monitoring tool to evaluate the success or effectiveness of the programme. We will not make too many claims of improved behaviour as this is a process that will not yield results overnight, but the above table indicates some of our successes. The most
important thing for us as leaders is to be aware of what we have learnt from this process and build on this learning to inform our future research.

The planning and implementation of this research has been beneficial to us as a committee as we have to learn to find solutions to challenges using the research cycle. The skills can also be used in dealing with our own personal challenges, as what we have learnt is applicable in all walks of life. We have learnt that inclusion of as many stakeholders as possible is important when we want to improve the values in our school.

This has been an exciting process for us, and as we reflect on what we have learnt, we are excited about the potential for positive change in our school and motivated to know that we can make a definite positive input into the lives of our learners and community – this helps us to stay motivated and to rekindle our passion for teaching. We have already identified fundraising as the next project that we will be doing using this model of research.

A well maintained school gives a sense of calm order and helps to instil a sense of pride: the school in 2010
ENHANCING PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT

Dower Practicing School

Mr M.W.G. Steyn (Principal) and Ms C.L. Machiu (Deputy)

Our context

Our school is situated in a fairly affluent area of Uitenhage, a town in the Eastern Cape. It is a dual medium primary school, with instruction offered in both Afrikaans and English. However, the majority of our learners are not from the immediate community, but live in townships some distance from the school. Only a few communities are within walking distance, one of them an informal settlement.

Approximately 40% of the learners come from impoverished homes, meaning that our attempts to provide quality education are negatively impacted by the social and financial problems that usually accompany poverty. Almost a quarter of the learners receive social grants. Only around 30% pay school fees in full. Many of the households are headed up by single parents or grandparents who have limited income and the transport costs to the school are often prohibitive for them.

We are the closest English medium school to the township. We have 800 learners and 24 teachers, meaning that our class sizes usually exceed 40. Because of this financial situation we have to fundraise to meet our expenses, but it is mainly the staff who is involved in this, and not parents.


_Dower Practicing School_

**Our concern**

Given the social, economic and educational contexts in which we have to work, we are concerned that the children are given the best educational experience possible. We would like to ensure that we send well-prepared learners to high school. However, we are hampered in our educational endeavours by a lack of parental involvement. Parental involvement is a very important component of education, and one that is especially lacking in certain communities in South Africa (Lemmer, 2007). It is known that parental involvement increases school attendance and improves the social behaviour of learners, which might be the reason that it has also been linked to an increase in self-esteem and academic achievement (Swap, 1987). Parents and teachers both benefit from this partnership, since they can support each other to attain positive changes in the children’s behaviour and in the school in general. Parents often possess skills and knowledge that can be valuable resources for teachers, yet, in our experience, cooperation with parents is not an easy process. Although parents are enthusiastic to enrol their children, and will come for days on end looking for a place, once the child is enrolled, we encounter major problems in getting them to co-operate with regard to assisting their children. Some of the problems we have encountered are the following:

- Children do not receive support at home with homework which often means they do not complete their assignments
- Parents do not attend annual information sessions where they receive important information on how to support their child with school activities, such as homework. Usually fewer than 50% of parents attend in Grade 1, and in the higher grades, fewer than 10%
- There is no community near to the school. We have two high schools in the area and a cemetery, but there is no residential community in the area. Children come from far away, therefore community involvement is difficult – many of the children live in communities 15km away. Transport is expensive and scarce
Why we are concerned

We know that schooling is an extension of the child’s up-bringing at home. However, it seems that parents are of the opinion that the school is the first and only place responsible for the education of their children. This is problematic for us because we know that we need to partner with the parents or caregivers in educating the child. It is important that parents and teachers work together to make sure that the children complete homework and tasks as this increases the likelihood that the child will do what is required of him/her to stay abreast with the learning taking place in class. As Epstein (1995) states, when parents and teachers share responsibilities for bringing up children, learners are more likely to be successful in acquiring academic and social skills. Ideally, parents and teachers should work closely together, thereby creating school-like families and family-like schools.

We would like our school to be “family-like”, where each child feels valued and special. We would also like to help our parents make their families more “school-like”, meaning that the education of the children receives priority, and where parents recognise and reward effort and progress. This is in line with the values that guide our educational work, namely respect for each other, commitment, responsibility and accountability. If we as teachers, and the parents, can live out these values, then there would be more involvement on both sides. In other words, the school would know more about the home circumstances of the child and the parents will know more about what is happening at school. The child will thus benefit from this. In order for families to become involved in schools, they need to feel welcome and valued. We therefore wish to create an atmosphere in the school that is conducive to making parents feel they are important.

On a practical note, since our school is not well resourced, we would like to enlist the talents of parents to help with tasks at school. If we can do that, then school fees can be kept low, a move that will be of benefit to all our parents. However, we don’t just want to “use” parents, but rather to work hand-in-hand with them. They should be part of the decision-making process about what needs to be done. We want to encourage them to take ownership of the school in the community, and work with us to make sure our school can offer a high quality educational experience for the learners. To this end, we would like to be able to work towards attaining the following:
Parents to take more ownership of the school and become involved with what is happening there

- Improve parental attendance at meetings
- Parents to assist teachers in identifying barriers to learning in their children
- Parents to volunteer to assist with administrative tasks or as classroom assistants

The question we therefore set out to answer was:

*How can we enhance parental involvement in our school?*

**Actions taken to improve the situation**

As school leaders, we were aware that it was important to involve all the staff in any attempt to improve the situation. We therefore involved all the staff in a SWOT analysis exercise, to ensure that they felt part of the problem identification process. Even although we, as leaders, had identified lack of parental involvement as an issue, if the staff did not agree or wanted to choose something else, we would have gone with this choice since it is imperative that people feel part of the decision-making process. The table below lists the areas identified during the SWOT analysis.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STRENGTHS:</th>
<th>WEAKNESSES:</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- We are an established school with a history</td>
<td>- Teachers unable to maintain discipline</td>
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<tr>
<td>- We have a good reputation</td>
<td>- Lack of toilet facilities</td>
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<tr>
<td>- We work well as a staff</td>
<td>- Lack of resources for teaching</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Staff are committed, talented, work well under pressure, have much expertise</td>
<td>- Overcrowded classes</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Teachers have abilities but they are often not used</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Principal does not delegate easily</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Lack of a computer lab</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Language of instruction not home language of most learners</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Untidy classrooms</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
OPPORTUNITIES:
- Many teachers are currently doing further studies or short learning programmes
- Partnerships with overseas schools
- Sponsorships
- 90th celebrations an opportunity to market school

THREATS:
- Non-payment of school fees
- Lack of parental involvement
- Drop in enrolment
- Lack of public transport
- Vandalism of school
- Competition from neighbouring schools
- Crime
- Incomplete buildings

We discussed this and came to the conclusion that more parental involvement in a meaningful way would help us to overcome most of the threats and weaknesses, therefore, through this democratic process, we attained “buy-in” from all the staff at the school.

Our first step was to try and understand the reason why parents are not more involved. It was important for us to hear from them and not just to assume the reasons. If we want to establish a partnership, then each party must have equal say and decision-making power. To this end, we distributed a questionnaire in English, Afrikaans and Xhosa. It was important for us that each parent could answer in their own language, so that inability to express themselves in a second language would not hamper their communication. In many cases, we also had to speak to the children to get the information that the parents could not respond to. The analysis of the questionnaire revealed the following:

- Transport is a major problem since they cannot afford to come to school meetings

A brainstorming session with teaching staff
- Language is problematic, since the parents speak Xhosa at home and often they do not understand the communications from the school
- Parents who have financial and other problems are hesitant to come to the school because they are not paying fees and this makes them feel uncomfortable

Based on these findings, we realised that it would be a challenge to overcome them, but we decided that we had to find ways to try and improve parental involvement and communication. We thought that communication was the best place to begin and therefore we brainstormed many options with our staff. We decided to implement the following strategies, namely a homework diary and bulk SMS.

**Homework diary:** the purpose of this is that parents must sign the diary when circulars are sent out and also when children are absent. The diary lists all the homework the child has to do and the parents must also sign for that. There is also important information about the school in the diary, as well as important dates. We know that this system has worked well at other schools and decided to try it. It is working quite well, but the success also depends on whether the staff check that the diary is used. So far, it seems like it has improved the situation more and we will get more feedback from the next parents meeting. The teachers report that the children are using them.

**Bulk SMS:** This is used to communicate important information and activities to parents. However, we have found that most calls are not received since parents change their SIM cards so often. We know this because if we try and call some of the numbers, about 50% of the time, the cell number is not in operation. We have learnt that our context makes this a poor option, in comparison to better resourced schools where this system has been successful. We cannot simply copy other actions, but need to find ones that suit our context.

**Home visits:** We have decided to start home visits during 2011 to parents who have not come to parental meetings. This has not commenced yet, but we are committed to doing this. We know in the past when we have taken children home, the parents tend to become more cooperative and involved in the education of the child.
Establish a PTA: We asked parents who would be willing to participate in this and 45 indicated they would be. We called them to a meeting and they established the PTA. We have just begun this, but it was important that the parents who wanted to be involved volunteered rather than being elected. Their first project will be to help organise events for the 90th celebrations of the school.

Satellite meetings: We intend to have meetings in the communities where the parents reside, and to perhaps have them on a Saturday. This will only be done in September/October of this year.

Establishing parent workgroups: On a voluntary basis once per month parents are invited to join some teachers in tackling maintenance around the school. So far, we have painted two of the foundation phase blocks and part of the intermediate block. We are also aiming to paint the old building soon.

Were our actions successful?

The measuring of success is a long-term undertaking. We need to implement everything during the course of the year and then after each event we will be able to assess in detail. However, as can be seen above, we have initiated several actions and most seem to be working well. This is a long-term project and the overall improvement in communication and involvement of parents will take some time to establish. During the work sessions, the atmosphere is great and we sometimes have whole families turning up. In one instance, a father came back on a Monday with glass and fitted it in a broken window – this has never happened before and is evidence that this sort of activity is improving involvement. The PTA parents are very excited about their projects. All in all, as leaders of the school, we can sense an improvement. We believe that we have been able to live out our values of responsibility, respect, accountability and commitment and that the parents have also begun to demonstrate these.
What have we learnt and how will it influence our future practice?

We have learnt many things from this project. We realise that it will take considerable time and effort to get more parents involved, since it involves shifting the mindsets of both parents and teachers.

We know that every parent that becomes involved will be a victory and they in turn need to motivate other parents to become involved too, and so, in time, the whole culture of the community with regard to involvement with the school will change. We also realise that there are parents who are willing to make inputs and who strive to turn them into reality. We have also learnt that we need to be evaluating and modifying constantly to assess whether the goals we set for the school are still relevant and whether we are still on track.

Action research is a method that can be used to solve or investigate most of the challenges/problems we encounter in our schools and is a useful way of getting everyone in the school involved in making the school environment a pleasant one.
As leaders, this process showed us that there is no situation that cannot be improved if one uses an action research approach. It does not matter how big or small the change is, but as a leader you learn from going through the process. We will definitely continue to address all our other problems in this way as we strive to improve our school and live out our values of responsibility, respect, accountability and commitment.

References
ADDRESSING HIGH TEENAGE PREGNANCY
AMONGST SCHOOLGIRLS

Gelvandale High School

Ingrid V. De Monk and Farrah Hendricks

Our context

Our school is situated in Helenvale, also known as “Katanga”. Most of the learners at our school come from this poor community, although some come from better-off areas. Most people in Helenvale are unemployed, therefore people are poor and they can hardly afford the basic necessities of life. Most parents cannot afford to pay school fees, because most of them rely on grants for their daily needs. According to the bursar at our school only 40% of all parents pay school fees.

Sometimes, up to 5 families share one small house. Gangs thrive in Helenvale and drug abuse is common, with children as young as 8 or 9 using or even selling drugs. They use the money to buy brand-name clothing and cell phones. Young girls get the money for this by using sex as a means of barter to get the things that their parents cannot afford. Alcohol abuse is also common amongst adults and the parents often use what little money they have to buy alcohol, rather than food for the family. Most children are not fed properly and come to school hungry. As a result of all these problems, girls tend to be sexually active from a young age, with results that there is a
high teen pregnancy rate.

Our concern

We are concerned about the high rate of teenage pregnancy at our school. For the past four years, our teenage pregnancy rate at school has been high:

- 2007 - 17
- 2008 - 16
- 2009 - 16
- 2010 - 13

The actual figures are actually higher since some girls hide their pregnancy and do not inform the principal, have the baby and return to school a few days later, meaning that they do not have to miss out on school. However, this does not mean that they escape the social consequences of teenage pregnancy. Teenage pregnancy brings with it a whole host of social problems, some of which are discussed below.

**School drop-out or interrupted education:** The Department of Education policy, gives girls who fall pregnant have the right to remain in school, but suggest up to a two year waiting period before girls can return to school in the interests of the child. Many of them do not return to school. Most drop out because they do not have the support from the school, the Education Department, churches and the broader community. These girls either stay at home to care for their babies, or they get a job to see to the needs of the baby. Only about 50% of the girls do in fact return to school but of this 50%, some drop out on a later stage because they cannot cope with the care of the baby and the schoolwork.

**Vulnerability to or participation in criminal activity:** Teenage girls in Helenvale are vulnerable to gangsters and older men, because they want money to buy the things that they need and want. Due to the poverty in Helenvale, some girls will do anything for money, even get involved in
criminal activities. We struggle to get a formal Education Department (Eastern Cape) Policy on pregnant girls.

**Why are we concerned?**

We are concerned about this situation for several reasons, as detailed below:

8. If girls fall pregnant they have to leave school and return the next year, they may in fact not return and drop out. Even if they do return, they find it hard to fit in and become a “school girl” again.

9. It is hard to cope with the school work and take care of a baby, and many of these girls fail the year in any case and drop out.

10. Pregnancy and/or dropping out affects their future life chances. Many of these girls have no life goals or hope of a better life and have to depend on a man to look after them. They add to the already high unemployment rate in Helenvale.

11. The self-esteem and confidence of the girls are affected, since they have little hope for the future.

12. Teen mothers also face many challenges in trying to complete their schooling because, notwithstanding the importance of their academic work, they are mothers first. As teenagers these girls are in a crucial phase of their lives as they are experiencing the integration of their personal identifications, abilities and opportunities available in society.

13. There are no strong policies to deal with any mockery, teasing or marginalizing of the young teen mothers in school. These remarks may affect the comfort of the teen mothers and may force them to drop out of school.

14. Sometimes pregnant girls have fear participating in class discussions for instance during Life Orientation classes, where topics like “teenage pregnancy” may arise.

15. Some pregnant girls also feel teachers do not understand their situation and they are expected to perform and behave just like any other student in their respective classes.

16. Due to poverty, many teen mothers cannot afford to take their babies to crèche or to hire a babysitter so that they can have time to study and do their homework.

17. Another problem linked to teenage pregnancy is, of course, the greater risk of becoming HIV positive. The government recognised this and targeted a reduction in teen pregnancy as
one of the key areas of the National Strategic Plan (NSP) to reduce the rate of new HIV infections by 50% by the year 2011 – a plan that has clearly not worked, considering we are now in 2011.

An excerpt from the Parliamentary Report on Teenage Pregnancy amongst school learners and in South Africa generally (3 September 2009) states the following:

*The rise in learner pregnancy was most likely the result of improved reporting rather than a real increase. Learner pregnancy rates were higher in schools located in poor areas and in schools that were poorly resourced. There was no empirical evidence of a link between teen fertility and the Child Support Grant. Termination of pregnancy by teens had increased over time and there was in fact a low uptake of the Child Support Grant among teens. Data showed that an increase in education resulted in a decrease in fertility and that pregnancy was no longer causing students to drop out of school, although dropping out was a significant risk factor for early pregnancy and HIV. In South Africa, only about a third of teen mothers returned to school.*

This situation is untenable for us, particularly the fact that “only about a third of teen mothers returned to school.” Once they drop out, the risk of becoming pregnant again and of contracting HIV increases sharply. This situation denies our values of social justice, respect, responsibility and accountability. Social justice is denied because the life chances of the girls are impaired by teen pregnancy. The girls also need to learn to be responsible and accountable; girls must take responsibility for their own sexual protection and learn to value and respect themselves. The young man involved in the pregnancy must also be held accountable for their actions and learn responsibility towards their child.

For these reasons, we chose the following questions to guide our intervention in the school:

*How can we reduce teenage pregnancy in our school?*

*How can we better support learners who are pregnant?*

We realised that there is no easy answer to these questions, and that it would require much research and various interventions to answer them both, but in this report we detail how we began to address our concerns.
Our actions to improve the situation

Based on our identification of the problem, we devised the following objectives to guide our interventions:

18. To raise awareness about the consequences of teenage pregnancies among our school girls
19. To help teenage school girls with the care of their babies and with other responsibilities they may have
20. To raise awareness about the added dangers of having unprotected sex in terms of HIV and STI infections
21. To heighten awareness of the importance of living out personal values such as respect, responsibility, accountability and social justice in order to address this issue

In order to attain the first, third and last objectives, we decided to enlist the help of all the Life Orientation (LO) teachers in this action research programme. Because of the lack of sexuality education in the current Life Orientation programme offered at our school, we drew up a programme for LO teachers about sexuality education and all the dangers of unprotected sex. We could do this, because one of us is the HOD for Life Orientation. We met with the teachers and facilitated discussion around the need for this and also guided them on how best to tackle these issues in class. Through this action, we made the other teachers aware of the magnitude of the problem at our school. Active involvement of all the LO teachers was crucial if we were to raise awareness of this issue among learners, as we knew that what the teachers chose to teach around this issue would determine the success of the intervention. Lessons were developed by the LO team and shared with each other. This supportive atmosphere allowed the teachers to feel more comfortable about addressing sexuality, contraception, HIV and AIDS and STIs. We implemented the lessons for a term and evaluated at the end of this period.

In order to attain objectives 2 and 4, we realised we had to address the needs of the learners who were pregnant or who had had babies for support. We arranged an initial meeting with Childline, an NGO who work to protect the rights of children. They were willing to assist with a 5-day workshop that they had developed to guide learners on how to successfully cope with their schoolwork and being a mother. The aims of the workshop included improving the self-worth, self-esteem and confidence of the participating girls. We had at least four meetings with Childline in
preparation for this workshop. We participated in the planning of the workshop and decided on the following:

- The workshop should be on the school grounds;
- Should be conducted during the September holiday;
- A Childline social worker would conduct the workshop; and
- The school would organise:
  - Venue,
  - Security,
  - Teacher presence during the days of the workshop; and
  - Recruitment of girls to attend workshop.

The purpose of the programme was not only to help them cope with their schoolwork and motherhood, but also to prevent further pregnancies and the practice of unsafe sex, as well as to inculcate prevention to the learners and encourage personal growth.

Childline wanted to conduct personal interviews with each participant and ask them to fill in a questionnaire, so that they could evaluate the impact of their intervention. However, this was not a success, because the girls were hesitant to open-up to an unknown social worker – who, incidentally, worked for an agency that had the power to remove children from parents if they suspected any form of neglect.

This was an important learning for us and we therefore decided to design a questionnaire for the girls to complete in their own time that could be used in the place of the existing data gathering methods. The purpose of the questionnaire was to establish what problems the girls experienced at home and at school as teenage mothers and how they perceive that we as a school can solve these problems. We realised that we had to obtain their perspective on the problem, otherwise we ran the risk of not addressing their real needs. Too often, the voice of the learner is silenced and we wanted to hear the voice. We followed appropriate ethical guidelines to maintain the confidentiality of the participating girls. We also arranged for a “box” outside the classroom (well protected area) for the completed questionnaires. They could drop the anonymous questionnaires into the box to protect their identity.
The workshop started on Monday 27 September 2010. On that day only three girls attended the workshop. Being a Monday and a school holiday, we decided to continue with the process. The attendance on Tuesday doubled to six. On Wednesday the number increased to nine and on the Thursday eight girls with their babies came to the workshop. On Friday the girls completed an evaluation form on the completion of the entire programme, but of course the trustworthiness of the evaluation was hampered by the fact that some did not attend the whole programme. However, it did show to us that the ones who attended on the Monday had had a positive experience, which they had then shared with their friends and “recruited” them to come along. We had follow-up meetings with Childline to rate the success and identify the pitfalls of the programme.

Another action we took, stemming from our learning about the power of peer opinion (as per the word of mouth message to attend the workshop) is that we are busy training peer educators at our school as a support to teachers in and outside the classroom. We hope that this can make an important contribution towards educating learners regarding sexuality education, abstinence and safer sex practices.

**How can we justify our claim to have had a positive impact in our school?**

We have gathered some evidence to show that the workshop with the teen mothers and the Life Orientation lessons about sex education have had a very positive impact on our learners.

From discussions with our LO colleagues, we know that they are also actively involved with the discussions and lessons about sexuality and sex education. The learners seem to have enjoyed the lessons so far, indicated by the fact that they ask questions and participate in the discussions. Some of the comments in the forms are given below:

The learners understand the importance of values such as respect, responsibility and accountability.

*Having sex before marriage is not a responsible thing to do. You must think before you act. Girls must respect themselves and care for their bodies.*
People don’t realise that your body is yours. No one can tell you what to do or even force you to do things that you don’t want to do. So, respect yourself, it will pay off.

The learners understand the consequences of unprotected sex.

These days boys only want you for sex and most likely you will get HIV/AIDS.

Some girls think it’s jokes to have children at such a young age. They are actually messing with their future. It is really sad to see such young children having children at such a young age, really sad.

The data provided in the evaluation forms are evidence that the learners have started to think about the consequences of teenage pregnancy and teenage motherhood. This provides the basis for us to continue our programme and include more teachers and learners.

From the evaluation forms collected at the workshop, we realised that the girls who attended the workshop really benefited from it. It provided them with the skills on how to care for their children and to cope with their schoolwork. It also taught them some valuable life skills.

Some of the girls said the following:

We have learnt a lot at the workshop. Apart from the information, the presenters was kind and sympathetic

The information helped me tremendous. I am very grateful towards the organisers of the event. I realise now the importance of the right choices in life.

The workshop was a very good idea. It really made a impact on me and I know now how to cope with the demands of life. More learners should attend these workshops

I realise now the responsibilities of being a mother and it was good to talk to girls in the same situation. We could learn from each other.

Although the workshop was only for five days, the impact on the learners was positive. The teachers at the school also reacted in a very positive manner towards the programme and there was plenty of support, especially from the LO teachers. This has motivated us to continue with the programme in order to reduce the number of teenage pregnancies at our school.
What we have learnt from this experience and how will it influence us in the future?

We realised that we must provide our learners with the necessary information and provide them with the skills to cope with the demands of their teenage years. We learnt that most of the time they get the wrong information from their friends, because the parents do not talk to their children about these things.

Some of the problems that we experienced with the workshop are the following:

22. We must start earlier with the programme and involve more learners, because only a few benefitted from this workshop.
23. Childline should be more involved in the recruitment of learners so that they do not feel threatened by them.
24. The group of girls must meet each other before the workshop, for an orientation session to allow them to get to know each other and the facilitator.
25. We must also change the questionnaire to a more learner friendly questionnaire and guide the learners when answering the questions.
26. The format of the workshop also needs to be revised. The participants made suggestions such as: the inclusion of more participatory activities; the use of media; and inclusion of speakers who have had a baby and still managed to do well in life.
27. We must also conduct a pre test and a post test. This will provide us with the learner’s pre knowledge and what they have learnt from the workshop.

We plan on having a follow up meeting with the girls to monitor their progress and their attitude towards their responsibilities. For the future, we plan on more workshops, involving Childline but working together, so that we can be sure the final programme is relevant to our community needs. We plan on making lessons and time available for pregnant girls and teen mothers at times that are convenient to them.

We are hoping that by working with Childline and with the support of our teachers we will be able to reduce the incidence of teenage pregnancies at our school.
We are pleased to have noted that the learners have become more aware of the importance of living out values such as respect, responsibility, accountability and social justice. We have also been able to better model these values by our involvement in this project. We spoke to a reporter from the local newspaper, who wrote an article (The Herald, 10 November 2010) about our project, who sensationalised it and put it on the front page. This caused quite a stir and made the wider community aware of the issue. We have been contacted by the Department of Education on a national level to share our findings with them and to become involved in a national programme. Because of the newspaper article, the district offices of the Department of Education, as well as the pharmacy department of the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University, are now involved in our project. The Pharmacy department students will present contraception advice to our learners.

All of this attention indicates to us that this is a problem that many people are concerned about and the action research process has enabled us to begin to address it and network with others to improve the impact of our interventions. As teachers and leaders, we have learnt that the action research process really makes us aware of what we are doing, why we are doing it, and how we could do it better. The constant self-reflections made us realise how easy it can be to drift away from our values, and how difficult it is to live them out in the face of barriers that threatened the success of our project. However, when we do stick to our values, we feel much better about ourselves and are able to give more of ourselves to the project.

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IMPROVING SCHOOL SAFETY AND SECURITY

Kama Primary School

Mrs Vuyiswa Gantana, Mrs Nozuko Mashicila and Mrs Nobantu Olifant (Principal, advisory)

Our Context

Our school is situated in a disadvantaged area. Most of our children are from economically challenged backgrounds, and unemployment is high in the community that our learners come from. A number of our pupils come from child-headed families, due to the HIV/AIDS pandemic. We currently have 700 pupils, 22 educators, and a clerk. We start from Grade R and go up to Grade 7.

The funding for South African schools is complex, and seeks to redress imbalances: “South Africa's schools are divided into five categories or "quintiles", according to their poverty ranking. The poorest schools are included in quintile 1 and the least poor in quintile 5. There are two steps in the classification of schools. First, a national poverty table, prepared by the Treasury, determines the poverty ranking of areas based on data from the national census including income levels, dependency ratios and literacy rates in the area. Provinces then rank schools from quintile 1 to 5, according to the catchment area of the school. Each national quintile contains 20% of all learners, with quintile 1 representing the poorest 20% and quintile 5 the wealthiest 20%.” (“Addressing quality through school fees and school funding”. Katharine Hall, Children’s Institute) and Sonja Giese (Promoting Access to Children’s Entitlements; South African Child Gauge 2008/2009: http://www.ci.org.za/depts/ci/pubs/pdf/general/gauge2008/part_two/quality.pdf)

We are a Quintile 3, No Fees School.

To assist learners from these backgrounds, the school provides children with one hot meal a day. We do have some useful resources, such as a library and computer centre. However, our
school is not generally well resourced, and our play-grounds are not conducive to playing safely. There are stones, and the grass is uneven. Our classrooms are furnished, but we do have challenges with broken windows and broken burglar bars. We have also suffered problems of theft, with windows being broken for entry. Our telephone lines have repeatedly been stolen, and this has cut off our internet access, as well as landline telephone and fax access. In short, we are typical example of a township school, with some resources, but not enough to function as well as we would like.

Our Concerns

The concern we identified for this project was learner safety on the school premises. The process for this decision was initiated by the principal, after she attended the action research workshops. Through a circular, teachers were asked to consider what issues were concerns, or what school needs there were. Another circular later called us to a meeting of all staff (which, in this case included the secretary and the grounds-man). The meeting was held in our school library. All issues that had been considered were put on the table. These included issues such as lateness, absenteeism, discipline, and also safety and security of learners and staff. At this meeting, everyone agreed that safety and security of learners and staff was of prime concern.

After discussions with all the teachers and the School Governing Body (SGB), there was full agreement that learner safety was the concern we wished to tackle in this project, and that some elements of discipline would also be involved.

Two members of the school management team were then tasked by the principal to form a small team, to conduct the research and carry out the action research activities relating to security. Lead by the principal, they held meetings with the staff (again, including the secretary and the grounds-man), since it was very important for all to be given the chance to be democratically involved in the process of improvement. The values that underpin action research are equality, democracy, participation and improvement in quality of life for all (Stringer, 2008), and these are the values that we aspired to adhere to in carrying out our action research project.
Why we were concerned

The staff felt that learners are not always safe and secure in their home environments, and that the school is the only place of safety many learners have. Learners need to learn that there is a safer side to their community, where love and support is available, should it not be so at home.

Some learners are forced to stay alone at home for long periods, while parents are at work; others have parents who have abandoned them or have died, and therefore do not have biological parents to care for them. Of this latter group, most then live with grandparents, who are often partially disabled, and are supported by disability grants. Some — a minority — live in child headed households, whom we support through our feeding scheme, with extras and leftovers. The child householders from the high school alongside us were often coming through the fence, before this project, looking for food from our children, to take home to their siblings. This was very sad, and painful, as sometimes the fence was broken by them, and this project needed to fix the fence.

In tackling this concern we hoped to teach learners values, to be better citizens, and to take care of their own environment. Amongst the values are responsibility for the school and their own environment, looking after things, and cleanliness. Also, we teach love and care, helping others, and honesty. We value openness. We also wish to teach them a sense of ownership and appreciation. An added value will be a growing sense of self-discipline. We are concerned about the lack of safety because the values that we wish to embody in our leadership of the school, are being denied by the current situation. As leaders we are also aware that we have to model and practically live out the values that we want learners to internalise, so we are not just changing the learners, but also hoping to change ourselves to live out our values more fully.
To guide our work, we wrote out questionnaires for all the educators, for four selected members of the School Governing Body, and for 20 Grade 6 and 7 learners. Because of lack of facilities, we asked a teacher with a clear handwriting to write these out, and then we photocopied them. These questionnaires raised the issue of whether safety and security was a problem, and what could be done. It emerged than this was a common concern. Some of the specific concerns raised from these questionnaires, and from discussions, regarding school safety are as follows:

**Burglaries**

We have had a lot of burglaries in the past. This negatively affects our safety, and the way our school operates. About two years ago our brand new photocopier was stolen within days of arrival. Our computer laboratory has been broken into, and some computers were stolen. Our classes have also been broken into, and equipment stolen. In a recent case, donations of cleaning materials from parents were stolen. Our school and national flags, attached to poles, were also stolen. Our telephone lines have repeatedly been stolen, and this has cut off our internet access, and also means we cannot have public telephones. Sections of the fence were also stolen.

These incidents dishearten teachers and learners, who feel devastated. Parents also stop donating if their donations have been stolen. This series of break-ins also threatens the safety of learners, and their feeling of security.

**Thoroughfare**

Our school boundary fence has not been secure in some places (see photo alongside). The fence is at times removed by thieves. Also, our gate was old, and had no secure locks. It was easy for unauthorized entry. Pupils’ possessions, such as their jerseys, lunch-tins and so on, were being stolen. This was an issue raised by the learners through the questionnaires.
People were able to enter and walk around, and some used the school as a short-cut to their homes. This compromised safety, and led to the disappearance of school bags, garden tools, and so on. Teachers felt they could not leave their own bags in classrooms.

**Unauthorized Entry and Child Collection**

Child collection was also difficult to control. Sometimes in the case of divorce and separation of parents, one partner would come and take a child from the school without the knowledge or permission of the other. This could lead to unhappiness, and the child being affected by this situation. The school was at times blamed for such incidents. While these were not many cases — just a few were reported — it caused a great sense of unhappiness, with a sense that a child was lost and could not be found. This was an issue raised by parents in the questionnaire.

**Learner Safety during Playtime and Pupil Movement**

Pupils have sometimes been hurt by running into each other during playtime. Also, some incidents have occurred during movement of pupils to and from assemblies or entering and leaving classes. Greater discipline and better order was needed during assembly and break. The playground is uneven, with stones and holes, and has rough grass. This leads to injuries during playtime. These injuries — not serious injuries, just cuts and scratches — were occasional, but they had to be looked after.

Thus, the responses to the questionnaires re-enforced the feelings of staff, that security was an issue to be addressed.

**What did we do?**

We attended the action research workshops, and met with our mentor, which guided our activities, although we had difficulties, often, in attending the more formal action research sessions. We also liaised with the principal on security matters: usually this liaison was informal, but was also done in staff meetings. We also reported on safety and security issues in staff meetings.
The teachers and the principal were asked to look around for safety issues, and report to us. This they mostly did through the principal, who referred the matters to us.

Based on the reports and our observations, the following aspects were prioritised for action by our committee, in consultation with the staff and principal. Our activities included:

We monitor the alarm system. This system, which was installed before the action research project, has become our responsibility. A security company is employed to monitor especially four key rooms, the secretary’s office, the kitchen, the computer room and the library. We have to monitor payments, and check that these are made. Also, they phone us if there are incidents, and to take further action.

We had a new, strong security gate installed. This gate runs on rollers, and is easy to open and shut, and has heavy padlocks.

The new school gate

We have temporarily repaired the fences, and have called a handyman to fix them more permanently and remove the tree trunks with which gaps have been closed. Also, we are planning to repair burglar guards that have been broken, and window latches.

We have put some fences near one set of swings, to prevent learners running into the swings (the second set of swings still needs a fence).
We have — encouraged by the principal — instituted and monitor a staff playground duty system: two teachers have a week’s responsibility to walk around during breaks, and check on children’s safety, and check the children when they return from break.

The new fences around the one set of swings

We have erected a notice board requesting visitors to report to the main office. Also, children can only be collected by a person known to the school staff.

We visited Diaz School (and other model schools) to observe how they conducted assembly, and tried to implement their practices.

We instituted school visits by persons who would talk about safety concerns. All learners were addressed by our committee about safety in assembly, and were spoken to by the principal. They were also introduced to the police: representatives from the police came (the police told learners to avoid strangers, and not to talk to people they didn’t know: they spoke mostly about sexual abuse). A team from Transnet spoke to the learners about safety in general: home, playtime, as well as railway line safety.

The Grassroots programme, LoveLife, also visited the school to speak to Grade 7 about HIV/AIDS, condoms, pregnancy, sanitary matters, and so forth.
Our Grade 7s were tested for drugs: not as a preventative measure, as we are not aware of our learners engaging in this activity and we have no reports of this, but as a learning exercise.

We have also instituted fire-drill training.

Also, we liaise with the discipline committee, and the school care-giver (who is a parent employed by the government) who looks after children when they are hurt or don’t feel well. She deals with toothaches, and tummies. She treats children using the first aid box in the secretary’s office, but she will also take learners home or to the clinic, if needs be.

Were our actions successful?

We still have a lot to improve, but we feel we are on our way. The number of burglaries has declined. Previously this was a frequent problem, but incidents have become fewer, and minor. The use of the school yard as a thoroughfare has stopped. There have been no further reports of learners being lost or going off with an unauthorized person. The other teachers do co-operate and
perform their playground duties. Also, we have become the people that others turn to for safety matters.

**What have we learned?**

We have learned that we can help ourselves. We have learned to work as a team, together with other structures, like the police, LoveLife, parents, learners and other staff members.

We have also learned that action research is an ongoing thing, where there is not a “right or wrong” approach. Rather, it is a process that develops us, and has helped us to understand situations better. For example, we have learned to put ourselves in the learners’ place, so as to understand where they are coming from, in order to help them, motivate and inspire them.

We can make ourselves and our learners feel more secure, learning and teaching in a good, more conducive environment. This research has also helped us to plan our day-to-day activities.

However, this project has been hard, but as we have been working we find we are getting better. Also, the other teachers have become more interested and helpful, though we have felt alone at times, especially with the work on the report: doing this report, it has been useful having the mentoring process, so we can say what we feel, and have it captured in writing. We find it easier to talk about our work, than to write it as a report. But this process has increased our eagerness to learn to write reports. We would like to develop computer skills.

Where we could improve: we feel it would be better to get the whole school even more involved. We are aware that improving school safety and security is an on-going process, and we have many things still to do. The grounds are not yet conducive to playing on, and are still not entirely safe. Old and potentially dangerous branches have to be cut off trees and the classroom burglar guards need professional welding. But we have had successes: since we have monitored the playground roster, we have reduced the number of injuries.

This is the first time we are doing “research”! But, on the other hand, we have found this research to be something practical. We also found the structure of the action research, in the diagram, very helpful for us.
Generally, our interaction with the mentor has improved our confidence.
IMPROVING THE SKILLS OF LEARNERS WHO ARE STRUGGLING TO COPE IN MAINSTREAM CLASSES

Machiu Primary School

Denise May, Cheryl Rossouw, Marilyn Jafta, Elroy Rhagosingh

Our context

Machiu Primary School is situated in the Northern Suburbs of Port Elizabeth near the Salt Pan, in Salt Lake. Our school has an enrolment of 864 learners from Grade One to Seven. The staff complement comprises 25 state-paid educators and three Grade R educators paid by the School Governing Body.

Our school is largely attended by underprivileged learners from different areas. Many of the learners are from poor socio-economic conditions and many parents are unemployed and illiterate. Also, many learners are from single-parent families and are reared by grandparents. Approximately 199 learners receive a social grant.

School fees per annum are R500 which is paid in full by two thirds of the learners. There are 45 learners with some form of barrier to learning: 15 learners diagnosed with ADD, 12 assessed as mild to moderate intellectual disabilities, 6 with moderate to severe intellectual disabilities, while 7 are
diagnosed with specific learning problems such as dyslexia and Tourettes Syndrome. Another have physical impairments which impinge on their learning e.g. eye problems or heart condition, etc.

Learners at the school come from Afrikaans, isiXhosa and English backgrounds. The language of learning and teaching (LOLT) is English. The school has been rated as a Quintile 5 school which means that it is classified as a well-resourced school, when in fact it is not well resourced at all. Most of the buildings are pre-fabs, there is no school hall, no music teachers or equipment, no art facilities, and no sports facilities or physical education classes. The school does not have money to pay outside people to take responsibility for organising such activities. This means that, apart from academic work, there is not much for learners to participate in, and if they are not strong in academic work, then they have little opportunity to shine. This can have a negative impact on the development of healthy self-esteem of learners and they also lose out on the chance to develop important life skills.

Our concern

As we move towards change in the school, we are committed to the values of responsibility for and accountability towards the learners with specific learning disabilities or barriers to learning. According to Pretorius (2007:24), education is about guiding the children forward to help them determine their position among other people and in the wider society. At Machiu Primary we are concerned with the scholastically challenged child’s needs. The questions we continually ask ourselves are:

- What would the learners have learnt when they leave school? and;
- What values, knowledge and skills will they embody to influence their younger siblings and other people in general?

In the past, some learners left school without any special skills and some could not be accommodated at the nearest school for scholastically challenged learners. Even if learners are accepted at this school, unemployment in the families contributed to the fact that learners were unable to afford the travelling costs. This meant that a number of learners per class eventually
dropped out of school altogether. If learners can complete education at schools such as these, they often gain employment, using the practical skills taught, and some even go onto tertiary education such as technical colleges. However, since few of our learners can gain enrolment at this school, we realised we had to do something here to help them.

Previously we provided adaptation classes for learners who did not progress academically. The adaptation classes taught them skills such as sewing, beading, weaving and so forth. With the infusion of these learners into the mainstream, in accordance with governmental policies of inclusion, classes have become over-crowded. There is no special intervention programme to equip these learners for the ‘big world’ as there are no trained educators to do this. This means that the learners progress to the next grade as a result of age cohort, without meeting the learning outcomes required of them in their current grade. This situation defeats the whole purpose of education, since it demoralises both learners and teachers, just to meet the requirements of the system.

Because a child or youth is a ‘participant’ in forming and developing his/her environment, inadequate education can cause a child’s participation in society to be damaging rather than meaningful and productive (Pretorius 2007:31). The scholastically deprived learners in the classroom are frustrated, and act in a negative way, which leads to the disturbance of other learners who want to work. They display a negative academic self-concept including behavioural problems such as aggression. Also, their learning activities are incomplete or unattempted as a result of the accumulated disadvantage.

We realise that change is a learning process and filled with risks. But, if we do not take the risk, no significant change will happen. If we neglect to develop the learners’ life skills, their sense of responsibility would remain underdeveloped, their self-esteem would remain low and their efforts and achievements would go unrecognised. We therefore wanted to reinstate the adaptation classes, but this time involving parents and the community to solve the problem of not having additional educators to do this. Our research question was framed as:

*How can we improve the skills of learners who are struggling to cope in mainstream classes?*
While the learners are learning how to sew, or do beadwork, they are also learning many more skills, such as how to commit to a project, how to concentrate on one thing at a time, how to organise and construct a business plan and so forth. This will help develop a healthy self-esteem and give them sense of achievement. Should we be successful in this project, we would like to believe that our learners would be better skilled for society and the ‘drop-out’ level will begin to decrease.

What we did to address the concern

Since we adopted an action research design, it was important that we involved as many staff as possible to encourage ownership of the project. We decided to ask our colleagues to compile a SWOT analysis at our strategic planning weekend, so that the problem could be identified as being one worthy of attention.

| STRENGTHS: democratic management, teamwork, committed teachers, good human relations with educators, school governing body, parents | WEAKNESSES: initiatives not always followed through; the learning barriers of learners present a challenge for teachers; absenteeism and late coming of learners and teachers |
| OPPORTUNITIES: development of relationships with community and business; available community leaders and parents | THREATS: financial constraints, overcrowded classes; lack of family support for learners; unemployment and poverty; lack of time; lack of resources |

The results of the SWOT analysis indicated that “remedial” learners were seen as a problem due to the behavioural problems the teachers experienced. The educators felt that discipline was a problem, but further analysis indicated that the bad discipline was a result of learners feeling neglected and frustrated because they could not cope in the mainstream. Absenteeism and
latecoming of learners was also linked to the frustrations of learners who found it difficult to keep up in the class.

Once the problem had been identified and owned by the whole staff, we contemplated what we could do to address it. The whole staff brainstormed possible actions and we chose to implement the following, by a democratic vote.

**Action 1:** At a staff meeting educators were requested to identify the learners with barriers to learning and then forward the names to the Individualised Learner Support Team (ILST) committee, whose duty it is to determine individual support plans for each learner. The parents of the respective learners were informed in order to give their consent for the learners to be referred to psychologists at NMMU-Vista Campus, NMMU-South Campus or privately to be assessed (‘screened’). Ultimately we ended up with 45 learners. During the identification process, some parents were reluctant to give their consent. In these cases the educators had a one-on-one consultation with parents to educate them about the benefits of having their child formally assessed, so that support could be arranged.

**Action 2:** We intended to set up classes for these learners where they could learn skills such as beadworking, knitting, woodwork, crafts or karate. We had to involve parents and the wider community in this endeavour, since the teachers would not be able to attend to all these needs. Letters were sent to all the parents to inform them about the project and requesting their assistance. A group of teachers headed by a School Management Team member was assigned to create a task plan with time frames indicating who could be responsible for which tasks. We were motivated to work together. The response from the parents was overwhelming, but many of them also expected to be paid for their

*Learning the skill of beadworking*
services. One excited parent who had just completed a course in beading came all the way from a distant township to offer her help, free of charge. We received offers for help with leatherwork, karate, needlework and woodwork. Some of the other challenges we encountered were lack of a venue to do these skills, lack of finances to give volunteers an honorarium, and lack of equipment for activities like sewing. Also, another external threat was the teachers’ strike which demoralised and preoccupied the staff. However, we were committed to overcoming these barriers.

**Action 3:** We reported back to the staff on the progress of the project and the challenges we were facing. The staff pledged their full support and commitment. Educators wanted to know if the beading would be an on-going process for the learners or just a ‘once off’ programme for this action research project. They had to be re-assured that it would be an on-going project which would promote fewer frustrated, undisciplined and low self-esteem learners in the classroom. The educator’s working condition would improve and teaching would be more interesting as a result of fewer interruptions. In this way, we strengthened commitment to the project.

**Action 4:** Taking 20 learners from Grade 6 and 7, we initiated a beading class. We chose the older learners, because they would be leaving the school soon and we wanted to help them first. They attended this class twice a week for a few hours at a time, and the children became extremely excited about it. Attendance was 100%. They created necklaces and bracelets that they later sold to the school community. This involved making their own posters to advertise the goods, helping to develop their artistic side. The next step is to make souvenirs for sale to tourists. One of the team members had to provide the start-up capital, but this was soon paid back.
How successful was our project?

We encountered many problems in our implementation which meant that only one of our attempts was successful, namely the beading workshop. We will now have to readdress some of the barriers such as finding appropriate venues, involving more community members, and finding some start up finance and/or equipment. We have already sourced one venue and are still working on the other issues. However the learners who have taken part in the beading are reportedly behaving better in class, and their enthusiasm is visible. Educators also report more involvement on the part of these learners. These learners are also going to teach the craft to other learners, which increases their self-esteem and expands the curriculum for all learners. The fact that they are interested in this also keeps them out of negative after-school activities. The real success of this project has been to show us that we need to work together as a team and that we can overcome problems if we do this. As a team, we are now very motivated and encouraged by this project.

What have we learnt from our research intervention?

We have learnt that it pays to make sacrifices for the learners, as we are rewarded by the results that benefit them. We benefit by living out our values of care and concern, responsibility and accountability towards learners and become better people and teachers for it. The action research project has increased our resilience. We know that we can overcome adversity if we put our minds to it. The action research process actually forces us to become creative in providing solutions to challenging situations. Working in a team helped us to understand each other better and build relationships. We were all very busy with other commitments and we often had to stand in for each other and help each other out in order to ensure the project progressed.
We intend to carry on with this project, and address the many barriers since as a school we think that this programme would also benefit parents via their involvement. Eventually, the skills may be used to support financial needs of learners and their families. We see this project also as a good marketing tool for the school, since we will become known as a school who caters for learners with scholastic challenges. All in all, the process of action research has proven to be a wonderful tool to help us to dream big, and then to plan, and implement action to attain these dreams. It has also opened up our eyes to the many opportunities that exist if you are looking for them. For example, we have acquired a sponsor for a venue, and also a sponsor for a feeding scheme, which are important spin-offs of this process.

References:

IMPROVING SCHOOL SAFETY

Malabar Primary School

Mr EL Serfontein, Ms P Pather and Ms S Pillay

Our school context

Malabar Primary school is situated in the Northern areas of Port Elizabeth, in the suburb of Malabar. The school’s name “Malabar” is a name from India which depicts a hill top. The name is aptly applied since this school, which was established in 1980, is situated on top of a hill. The motto of the school is *Strength of Mind and Body*. At the time of inception of this school, it started with Standard 1 to Standard 3 which is now Grade One to Grade Three. To date the school has two Grade R classes (reception classes) and four of each grade from Grade 1 to Grade 7. Many past learners from Malabar Primary have become very successful in their careers.

Malabar Primary is unique in that it has a multi-cultural staff as well as learners. There are 30 staff members, of whom 21 are permanent staff whilst the others are either in a temporary capacity, or appointed to posts funded by the School Governing Body. Currently we have 1,039 learners. The learners hail from different areas of Port Elizabeth. The socio-economic conditions of most of the pupils are poor and many come from disadvantaged backgrounds. While the present school fees are R720 per annum, the rate of non-payment of school fees is staggering. Many of the learners’ parents receive social welfare grants and many apply for either full or partial exemption from the payment of school fees.

The school boasts a library which is currently being upgraded with new books, a television, wall charts and useful equipment that are used by teachers in their classes. We now have a data projector which was bought for the school by the previous year’s Grade 7 classes. Donations in the
form of cash and books have made this venture possible. We also have a computer room which consists of 26 computers. These have been purchased from money that was raised by the various fundraising ventures at the school. There is a science laboratory which is functional but not fully equipped.

The local community, despite not having children at the school, always supports the school with regard to sponsorships, donations and attending our fundraising events. The school depends upon this support since the parents from outside Malabar are not always able to attend functions held at the school due to financial and other constraints. To show our appreciation to the community, the learners and staff regularly visit the local Senior Citizens home and entertain the citizens with tasty edibles and song and dance.

Our concern

As a School Management Team, we need to ensure that the learners and all stakeholders are always protected against injury, inside as well as outside the classrooms at our school. Therefore, we are constantly monitoring the premises for any physical danger that could befall the learners whilst on the premises. The school has its own Safety Policy and Safety Committee in place. As a result, fire-drills are executed during the course of the year and fire extinguishers are strategically placed in various areas around the school. The extinguishers are regularly serviced so that they are operational at any time.

However, we also have two other major safety concerns. The first is an unsafe staircase in one of the school blocks and the second is an unsafe drop off zone for learners outside our school.

Why we are concerned

The unsafe staircase became a serious problem. We have a double storey building with wings on either side of each other, each of which has many classrooms. There are only two exit staircases for the upstairs part of the block. Through constant use, the stairs on one of the staircases have literally been falling apart and have become extremely slippery when wet. As a result, many children have slipped and fallen down the stairs and sustained serious injuries. Parents were not
sympathetic to the school in these instances. Furthermore, in the past the children tended to push and shove each other on the stairs in a bid to get up or down them as quickly as possible. Also, some children also used to run up and down the stairs. As a result of this behaviour, children have fallen down the already dangerous stairs and injured themselves.

Learners crowding the staircase in a rush to get down

Regarding the unsafe drop-off zone, the school has one double gate at the front entrance of the school through which both cars and pupils enter. Learners alight from vehicles and run blindly into the school yard oblivious to in-coming traffic or other vehicles that are moving off. We have not had any accidents to date, but this is something which can no longer be allowed to continue as it will be detrimental to the safety of our learners. Our objective is to relocate this drop off zone to an unused park adjacent to the school which will be much safer for all concerned. This land, however, belongs to the Municipality. Until recently, the park was not fenced off, with the result that some taxi drivers would drive onto the park to drop off the children thereby creating another, but illegal and unsafe, drop off area.

This situation is not acceptable to us, since it violates our values of care and compassion. We hold ourselves accountable for the safety of the learners and, apart from the legal implications, we
are not happy that our learners’ safety is not at an acceptable level. We would also like to raise awareness among the learners that they have to accept responsibility for their own behaviour, and act in a way that does not endanger the safety of others, or their own safety. We would like them to learn how to behave in public spaces, as this is an important life skill and also helps to inculcate a sense of responsibility and care for others.

**What we did to improve the situation**

We attended an action research training session for the DG Murray Trust *Integrated School Development and Improvement Project* at the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University. After consultation with the principal, it was decided that we would participate in the action research component of the project. We held a staff meeting in March 2010 and discussed this new project. We brainstormed the many concerns that we had as a staff and eventually decided to focus on school safety. The staff mandated the three of us to get this project into operation.

However, although our goal was the improvement of safety at our school, we soon realized that we needed to focus on short term and long term objectives to achieve our goal. Therefore, our short-term objective was to try to make the staircase safer and our long term objective was to relocate the drop off zone from in front of the school gates to a park adjacent to the school.

Thereafter, we attended several action research sessions where we learnt how to “tackle” our project. We conducted a baseline assessment of the safety of the staircase and identified what was needed to be done to improve its safety. We conducted a survey regarding the safety of the staircase, using the teachers, learners and parents as respondents. The findings were then discussed with our mentor in April 2010. Since finance was a consistent constraint, we would need to look at alternative methods of financing our plan. We decided that we needed to paint the staircase, divide it into two sections and erect signs displaying how the children should behave on the stairs.

In addition, a sample of learners completed a questionnaire and documented their observations on the movement of learners up and down the staircase in short essays. The questionnaire attempted to obtain information from the learners about the following:
Which areas in the school are unsafe?
How can the staircase be made safer?
What is the main cause of injuries on the staircase?
Is the scholar patrol system effective enough for road safety?
What are the main causes of traffic accidents?
Is the drop off zone at the main gates of the school safe?
What suggestions can you make to solve the drop off zone congestion problem?

The learners identified the following areas as unsafe: staircase, clubhouse, front and back gate. In their responses to the questionnaire and in their short essays, the learners were able to provide valuable suggestions and exhibited an awareness of safety issues in the school. The teachers also provided valuable suggestions in short written responses.

The staircase in the senior primary block is in constant use by the teachers and learners; however the way that it is used is rather unsafe and has led and can lead to violent behaviour amongst learners as well as injuries.

Learners tend to push each other as they walk up or down the stairs, it may be a mistake, but tempers begin to flare and learners get physical. This becomes dangerous as they can easily fall or bump their heads during the ‘fight’.

After school learners are coming down the stairs and some are going up to fetch their bags (returning from the field), there is total chaos as they try to fit through each other and a lot of pushing and shoving occurs which can lead to children falling and getting hurt.

At times teachers and learners are going in opposite directions and this leads to confusion, teachers and learners can easily trip and fall. Usually after a bell rings learners tend to descend the stairs in such a manner that it is nearly impossible for anyone to get anywhere other than in the direction the learners are going.

There was an incident whereby learners were pushing the younger children down the stairs and led to a girl getting hurt.
Having gathered this information, we realised that the stairs should be first priority. We made temporary signs and laminated these:

- KEEP LEFT
- PASS RIGHT and
- NO RUNNING

At an assembly the pupils were informed of the nature of the project and the reasons for this being done. They needed to walk up and down the stairs keeping left at all times when walking up and keeping right when walking down, so as to avoid causing any obstruction to each other. The movement of learners on the staircases was also monitored by teachers and prefects.

*Learners using the stairs more safely*

We then wrote letters to the municipal ward councillor for assistance, particularly with regard to the unsafe drop off zone and the need to be able to use the municipal park adjacent to the school as a drop off zone. She visited the school and assessed our needs. She has not yet been able to assist us in the relocation of the drop off zone for children. However, she was able to ensure that the park was fenced, thereby preventing it from being used as an alternative illegal and unsafe drop off zone in the interim.

She offered advice and secured the sponsorship of black non-slip paint for the staircase. We could only eventually follow through with the painting of the staircase in early 2011 due to time and monetary constraints. We had also been advised that sea sand could be used as well because this
would contribute to a non-slip surface. We enlisted the help of the non-teaching staff and they painted the staircase, threw the sea sand over the first coat of paint, repainted and then painted a yellow stripe down the centre, thereby dividing the staircase.

After a short period of time however, the black paint began to peel off due to excess traffic. Consequently, we held a staff meeting where we all tried to revisit our use of this paint. The principal then suggested that we replace the paint with non-slip tiles. This idea was met with much approval by all. In addition, the KEEP LEFT, PASS RIGHT and NO RUNNING signs will be made of more durable perspex. We then discussed possible fundraising ventures to raise enough money to cover the cost of the tiles and the signs. We have already had one “civvies” day (where the children pay a small amount for the privilege to come to school in their own clothes, rather than in uniform) which raised R1400,00 which will be put towards the costs of the project. Raising the funds for this project is something that cannot be done overnight and will always be on the agenda until the project has been implemented completely.

How do we know that we have improved the situation?

As mentioned above, initially signs were put up to encourage learners to KEEP LEFT, PASS RIGHT and not to run on the staircases. In addition, teachers and prefects monitored movement on the staircases. Initially this was difficult to put into practice until their mind-set changed and this method gained support from the children. Both teachers and prefects were eager to encourage pupils to implement this safety measure.

However, after the stairs were painted, to the amazement and joy of the staff, everyone who used the two staircases did so with care. They are now constantly reminded by each other to keep left and not to run down the staircases. This small accomplishment has shown us that small efforts such as this can make a big difference in keeping a child safe.
Unfortunately, we have made very little progress in attempting to shift the drop off zone. However, we will continue to work on it.

**What have we learnt from our research intervention?**

As a group we have realized that we can work together and accomplish goals that can better benefit our school. We have learnt that we are so wrapped up in our little cocoons that we sometimes cannot think “out of the box”. We looked for help from all corners and found that there are many companies, people, parents and even political office bearers who are ever willing to assist or to offer advice. We even realized that in order to obtain suggestions of alternative methods to tackle a task, all that was needed was for us to ask for help.

Above all we have learnt that no problem is too big. Through action research we learnt that our concern of school safety was very big but, by breaking it down into smaller parts, we can accomplish many goals.

We have learnt to work together as a team. Also, by attending the action research sessions, we met educators from other schools and learnt to listen to each other’s concerns, difficulties, failures and achievements. This enabled us both to learn and to offer help where we could. We also empathized with each other as educators regarding the short comings of the situations we found ourselves in. No problem is ever too big or worse than the next school. We made many friends and soon realized that teaching is a Calling and not a Job. Teachers will always be doing everything possible to make the life of a child at a school a safe and nurturing one.
STRENGTHENING THE EXTRA-MURAL PROGRAMME

Sapphire Road Primary School

Moefeda Krause, Sylvia Saulse, Sylvia Frans and Alicia Baatjes

Our context

Sapphire Road Primary is situated in Booysen Park, Port Elizabeth, South Africa but it mainly services the disadvantaged areas of Kleinskool, Kwanoxolo, Frans Valley, Greenfields, Pola Park and the Nceba Faku Village. Our learner population has grown from 559 in 2001 to 1,115 in 2011. We have Grade R to Grade 7. Our challenges have increased because 90% of our parents are unemployed.

We adopted a policy that ensures that no child is excluded from a school because of school fees. The School Governing Body therefore took a courageous decision in 2005 to abolish school fees and to fundraise instead. In 2010 we were officially declared a ‘no school fee’ School by the Department of Education.

The school not only focuses on educating learners but the capacitating of our parents and the community at large, with skills that would be beneficial to the individual, the community and the school in general.

Sapphire Road Primary shares the vision of Government, Business and the Education Department which is to ensure that our schools not only become centres of academic excellence, but serve as a catalyst for social and economic change in previously disadvantaged communities.

The objectives and vision of our school can only be achieved with the assistance of government, business, community and parents, and social partners. Our vision is to ensure that the school is used as a base to educate our learners and also provide the opportunity for development of parents and the community. This can be done if the school serves as a centre of educational and social transformation.
We have attained awards on both a national and international scale for the work we have been doing as a school. Since we are a health promoting school, we focus on the promotion of overall health in 5 areas: skills, policies, environment, community engagement and outreach and service provision.

Some of our most notable achievements in these areas have been:

**Skills:** Our teachers are part of an international pilot programme that focuses on the improvement of best teaching practices and undergo continuous training in programmes related to the curriculum. They also have access to various programmes that promote their wellness.
**Policies:** We have developed many policies to ensure the wellness of our learners, teachers and other staff, as well as contributing to the wellness of the community. The school adopted parent and teacher charters that recommit us to providing quality education to the most vulnerable sector of society. We are also a no fee school.

**Environment:** The building of two security houses on the premises of the school using bricks that were made by unemployed parents. The homeless families that live in these houses stay for free and in return they look after the security of the school. As a result, we have had no vandalism since 2003.

- The fitting of security gates, to protect the school, by unemployed parents, trained at our skill school.
- Repairs to school furniture and securing of neighbouring schools buildings, using our skill school.

**Community engagement and outreach:**

- We use volunteer parents as teachers assistants in the classrooms
- No school fees since 2006.
- Training of unemployed youth and parents in basic skills like welding, computer literacy, sewing and carpentry. The school has trained more than 1000 unemployed members of the community, through the skills programme.
- The establishment of two vegetable gardens on the school. The produce from this garden is shared between the people that work the garden, those infected or affected by HIV/AIDS and the school.
- The opening of a gym by the weightlifting association of South Africa to promote weightlifting development in the area. Two of the learners from these classes won gold medals at the national Weightlifting championships in 2005.
- The school is used by five different churches, from the surrounding area, to hold services over weekends.

**Services:** Opening of an accredited training centre for the unemployed, on the premises of the school that will train the unemployed from 10 other communities.
• ABET classes for parents to teach reading skills.
• The opening of a counselling centre on the premises of the school to help the community deal with social issues confronting them, including HIV/AIDS. The centre is manned by peer counsellors who do advocacy as well as home based care.
• Opening of The House of Hope, 2010, on the premises of the school that focuses on remedial intervention during the day and during the evening acts as a place of safety for those children who feel threatened in the community.
• Building of a clinic run by 10 parent volunteers and a supervising doctor. The supervisor of the clinic is a retired nurse who volunteers her services free of charge.

We have 88 volunteers who work on a daily basis in the school, developing their own skills as:
• Teacher Assistants
• Day and night security
• Administration volunteers
• Computer trainers
• Orphaned and vulnerable children volunteers
• Vegetable gardeners
• Clinic nurses
• Plumbers
• Painters
• Grass cutters
• Sewers

These volunteers are unemployed and by volunteering gain valuable work experience to build up a CV. We have won many national and international awards for these achievements.

Although we have attained much success in our school improvement efforts, we ascribe to the action research principles of lifelong learning and continual improvement. We were invited to participate in an action research project by the Faculty of Education at the University and welcomed this opportunity to learn how to improve our educational offerings.
Beginning the process

In line with the democratic and participatory nature of action research, we met with the principal, discussed our views and then laid out our plans to the School Management Team. It was suggested that we should lay out our plans to the entire staff. We now describe how we implemented the process.

The Action Research team, consisting of the four members stated in this report, met and each one of us brainstormed ideas we had for school improvement. We, as a team, identified the following areas as being in need of improvement:

- Discipline, as a whole, in all the areas of the school, e.g. staff, pupils and non-teaching staff
- Learners with learning barriers
- Teacher Assistants – the positive role they can play
- Finance
- Absenteeism

We then met with the whole staff and explained the concept of the action research project and what part each of us will be playing in the focus area that we will identify. We, as a team shared our ideas and asked for more ideas from the staff. All the suggestions were written on the board and the necessity of each area was explained by the person suggesting it. After discussing all the proposed ideas, the feeling was that all areas warranted attention but staff recognized that we could only choose one. Staff then voted to decide which area would be identified.

The focus area that staff voted for was Extra-mural Activities. This had not been one of the original suggestions by the team and even the suggestion from the Principal was outvoted. This underlined for us the importance of democratic decision-making, since if we had not given the entire staff the opportunity to give input, we would have embarked on a project that they did not think was warranted, and therefore cooperation would have been problematic.
Explaining our concern

As a school we were only about 30% productive when it came to extra-mural activities. Part of our vision was to look at the holistic development of the learners and failure to have a proper functioning extra-mural programme prevented us from reaching this vision. Some of the contributing reasons we could identify, in consultation with staff, were the following:

- Sports facilities and lack of equipment hindered us in delivery of this vision. Our netball field is very uneven; we have one field we use for both rugby and soccer; we have very little equipment in the form of balls, etc.
- No proper monitoring and leadership support for an extra-mural programme: sport had been sacrificed while we attended to other priorities
- We did not keep to the fixtures and did not play all the matches that we were expected to play in school leagues. This was because we had not organized our team sports well
- Many of the children are bussed to school and this negatively impacts on our ability to have after-school practice since children need to use the contracted transport. This affects 340 of our children

This was a concern to us because sport and extra-mural activities are important for the holistic development of the child. Sport improves concentration and coordination, enhances self-discipline, cooperation with others, and generally helps with the development of life skills.

We felt that our values were being denied by this situation. The values we ascribe to, and which are displayed on the wall of the principal’s office, are the following:
This situation was not acceptable to us because we were not able to live out our values and therefore we looked at ways of improving the situation. Our research question was framed as:

_How can we improve our extra-mural programme at school?_

**Actions taken to address our concern**

The team suggested that the sport committee needed to look at the present state of extra-mural activity and analyse what our strengths and weaknesses were and, most importantly, come back to staff with recommendations that we could implement.
The sports committee did this and came back with suggestions that we deliberated in a staff meeting. The following recommendations were adopted in this staff meeting.

We committed to remaining consistent with the implementation of the adopted plan. We felt that it was important to make this commitment a resolution so that the plan would be carried through to fruition. By committing to this as a staff, we would be able to live out our values of cooperation and diligence.

Our extra-mural activities at our school are the following: rugby, soccer, netball, chess, spiritual dancing, traditional dancing, Sapphire Buddies\(^1\) choir and judo. Our plan was to divide the children into the different sporting and extra-mural codes according to their choice and allow staff to choose which code they wanted to become involved in – it was expected that each educator would participate in one code, since they had committed to this project. When they choose their teams, there was noticeable excitement among the educators and the children, which indicated that this was experienced as an enjoyable project.

Our sewing volunteers made the strips for the teams and our maintenance volunteers patched up the netball court.

We then began to collect learner information e.g. birth certificates, so that we could apply for players cards for those taking part in sports who were in school leagues. Where children were too old for the codes, they had to help with the cleaning of the grounds, so everyone was involved in some way. We entered all the fixtures on a board and committed to attending each one.

\(^1\)Sapphire Buddies is a club that focuses on environmental issues in the school. For example, they identify areas of the school that need improvement and organise to have this done e.g. they painted decorative murals on a wall that was dirty and in need of painting.
Some of the sports were difficult for educators to coach, due to lack of skills and experience, therefore we approached ex-pupils, parents and the community to help us. For instance, the local rugby Club, Booysens Pride, volunteered to help with the coaching of the rugby teams. Because we only have a few male teachers at our school, some of the ladies were in charge of the soccer. We did not have the skills and abilities to train the children, therefore we made use of the children who play soccer for outside clubs, to help their peers to do the warm up exercises and teach them various skills with the balls. We also called upon some of the older boys who are at High School to help us train the children. In this way, we instituted peer coaching, which had benefits for both the trainers and the children being trained.

We have volunteers who we call teachers assistants. They are parents, mostly ladies, from the community who help us in different ways. Some of these ladies play netball and therefore they also helped with the coaching of the girls.

We set Monday as a day when the whole school would be involved in extra-mural activities, with matches played on the other days. Because the children are bussed home, we arranged with the transport companies to arrive later on these days. We wrote a letter to the

*Netball team in action, with teacher assistants*
parents to inform them of this.

Not all the children can play sport; therefore we have music and dancing also as a code. If they have a project, they sometimes come to school on a Saturday to complete the task.

**Has the situation improved?**

We think that we have made a good start in overcoming some of the barriers that were hampering our provision of extra-mural activities for the children.

The staff and children appear to be very enthusiastic about the sport. Children came prepared and there was good discipline during training. Some of the children even walked long distances to their homes after matches in groups, which shows their motivation. All children in Grades 4-7 took part in extra-murals, while the younger grades only did netball and cricket. We could see that they loved to work together as a team. Because they had to play together, they learnt to respect each other and to realize that although they are from different cultures and backgrounds, they need to work with each other to reach their goal and to give their very best for the team. Our values of loyalty to the team and school, cooperation, diligence and respect were being lived out as staff and children were engrossed in these activities.

We managed to play every fixture possible, in contrast to other years when we had cancelled many of them. The teacher strike did cause us to miss some, but all the schools were affected by this, so we did not let them down by cancelling. In other words, we managed to stick to our scheduled matches.

A sense of belonging and of mutual interest could be seen as those who did not play came to cheer on their friends. This was instilling loyalty and pride in our learners.

The grass on the rugby field was cut and it is still in good condition because the male volunteers at our school keep it short. Some of the rugby players were chosen to represent Port Elizabeth North in Somerset East. When they were honoured at assembly, their self-esteem was boosted and a sense of pride in the school was created.
Our volunteers also made netball poles and repaired the field. The 5 ladies in the community took the responsibility to coach the netball girls, increasing school-community partnership.

In judo, our team went to the national championships in Gauteng and won 2 bronze, 1 gold and 2 silver medals. Since we did not have expertise in judo coaching, we invited the Booysens Park Judo Club to come to our school to train them.

The traditional dancing has been taken over by the mothers in the community and a drama group has also emerged from this, so again we are strengthening cooperation with the community and creating a sense of loyalty to the school.

We have also divided the children into athletic codes and are practising regularly with them. We had not had athletics at the school, and plan to continue working on these codes.

For those who are artistic, rather than sporty, we approached a local artist to work with them. The paintings were then auctioned on the internet via E Bay and we made R60 000 for the school.

All in all, we have tried our best to live out our value of diligence by making sure that this project was implemented to ensure that extra-mural activities took place. We are still very enthusiastic about it, as is the rest of the school. The one drawback was the teachers’ strike which disrupted some of our training and matches. However, this was out of our control. After the strike, we had to concentrate more on our academic work to prepare the learners for promotion to the next grade, but hopefully this will not happen again this year.

Reflection on learning

Participation in this project has taught us many things. The process of action research is very democratic and participative, and we have seen that this helps all staff to take ownership of a project and commit to implementing it. We have also learnt that our community is a wonderful resource that can help us to reach our goals. By strengthening community-school partnerships, we can achieve much more than we could on our own. Action research promotes this form of participative cooperation.
We really feel that our teamwork as staff has improved and that our enthusiasm and sense of satisfaction in our work has increased. We are busy now planning the athletics for later in the year and there is visible excitement among learners and staff about this. We have also been amazed by the talents of our children, given the chance to display them, and have been reminded that we must never underestimate a child’s ability.

We do have to make provision in planning for unforeseen circumstances e.g. strikes, but action research has been a wonderful process for us. It has made us aware that what we are doing can be very influential – just a small change can have a lasting positive impact. We have always worked well together in this school but this process reinforced our convictions about the value of democratic, inclusive ways of working. As leaders, we also learnt that we must welcome having our own ideas challenged and actually encourage it. Often the best ideas come out of dissenting voices and our job as leaders is not to make sure our ideas get implemented, but to listen to others and help the whole school work towards a collective vision. We would like to extend this to our younger grades and this is our next challenge.

*Instilling loyalty and pride, and a sense of belonging*
HOW DO WE GET OUR LEARNERS TO READ MORE?

St James Roman Catholic High School

Elroy Ruiters

Our school context

St James Roman Catholic Vocational High School was formally opened by the Missionary Sisters of the Assumption in 1939. The school later absorbed St Theresa’s school which had been located in the North End suburb of the city. In 1951, soon after the beginning of the apartheid era in the country, it became the Assumption Chinese College, catering for Chinese children living in the suburb of Schauderville. They were accommodated in what is now the main administration block of St James Roman Catholic High School. After Chinese people were forcibly removed to the Kabega Park suburb and Chinese learners were allowed to attend designated “white” schools, the building formally became St James (Roman Catholic) Secondary School, initially catering for girls from the surrounding suburb of Schauderville. Towards the end of the apartheid era, the school immediately became open to children from all population groups, but still remained an all-girls school.

Whilst the school is situated in the Northern suburban areas, it draws most of its learners from former ‘black’ suburbs as far afield as Motherwell, one of the oldest townships in Port Elizabeth, as well as learners from Greenbushes, a semi rural area outside Port Elizabeth. Consequently, more than 60% of the learners at the school are Xhosa-speaking. The school is situated in a formerly
designated “coloured” area of Port Elizabeth, due to apartheid policies of old, and is surrounded by a relatively impoverished working class community.

While the ethos of the school is firmly based in Catholicism, it is only fair to say that Catholics represent a minority of the school community and that therefore the school is spiritually diverse. While the school is still owned by the Catholic Church, the teachers are paid by the Department of Education who also provide financial support for maintenance costs. Therefore, the school is essentially a public school.

As mentioned above, over 60% of the learners at the school are Xhosa-speaking, while the remainder are either Afrikaans or English speaking. However, the language of instruction at the school is English. A third, primary or home language subject, isiXhosa, was introduced to cater for Xhosa-speaking learners, but surprisingly most of these learners chose to study English as their primary or home language.

The school is reasonably well resourced, mainly as a result of the continuing support from the Catholic Church who assist in raising funds for the school from international donors.

Our concern

Owing to the fact that the vast majority of the learners at our school are Xhosa-speaking and that the medium of instruction is English, the perception amongst teachers at the school is that many learners have low levels of reading ability in English, particularly those entering the school at the Grade 8 level. This is because the Xhosa-speaking learners come from primary schools where their reading ability in English has not been developed to a level at which they can cope in Grade 8 at our school. Consequently, many of our Grade 8 learners battle to cope with the demands of the curriculum and some even drop out of the school after Grade 8 or 9.

Another perception of our teachers is that our learners only read for school work, and do not read for enjoyment or for their own self-development. In short, our learners see reading as a “drag”.
Why we are concerned

Our school strives for excellence and the optimal development of learners. However, this is not being achieved due to their lack of literacy skills in English. Therefore, learners are struggling to read and their academic work is suffering, resulting in poor performance in all subjects.

Furthermore, there is also a feeling amongst the staff of the school that learners’ reading ability in English can be significantly improved if they read more, even if it is mainly for pleasure. We also think that reading extensively improves general knowledge, grammar, concentration and spelling. However, all of these benefits are lost because our learners do not read enough in English. Most teachers at our school value reading extensively, because they are aware of the benefits for learners, particularly in improving their overall academic performance.

Also, prior to the implementation of this action research project, there was no real culture of reading extensively in our school. The library, which contained old books, had become neglected and soon became a disused store room. There was no time set aside for reading in the timetable and very little was done to promote reading in the school, or to raise awareness of its benefits. Only individual teachers were making attempts to get the children to read more, but there was no whole school strategy to do so. This situation denied our value of wanting each learner to be able to reach their potential. If they cannot read well, their academic performance will be lower and they will not be able to reach their full potential. We believe that, even although these children face many social and economic challenges in life, they will be able to better their opportunities if they make the most of their educational opportunities.
What we did to improve the situation

Initially, when we joined the DG Murray Trust Integrated School Development and Improvement Project at the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University, we met with the staff of the school to decide on our action research project. At the meeting, the staff raised two options – improving sport at the school, or getting learners to read more. Eventually, it was decided to focus on getting learners to read more by promoting a culture of reading at the school. Subsequent to this meeting a small committee was set up to implement the project. Our tentative plans for the project involved the following:

- Conduct a survey of learners’ reading preferences and habits.
- Set aside one period per week for silent reading.
- Re-activate the library which had become a store room.
- Set up class book corners.
- Promote reading at the school in a variety of ways.

The first thing we did was to draw up a simple questionnaire to find out what learners read and what their attitude to reading was at the time. The questionnaire was administered to a small sample of learners and then the data was analysed. However, the results were not particularly revealing at this stage. Our mentor then introduced us to a website called Reading Connects, a project of the National Literacy Trust in the United Kingdom (www.literacytrust.org.uk/reading_connects), which provided a range of innovative ideas and information on how to promote reading in schools. The website also contained two questionnaires, one which was a “Self-perception as a reader survey” and the other which was about “You and your reading”. Copies of these questionnaires were then administered to a larger sample of learners – 10 from each grade.

The “Self-perception as a reader survey” asked the learners to rate themselves as to how good they were at reading, whether they enjoyed reading, what they read outside school and how often they read, as well as what they think about reading, for example how important they think it is. The survey also asked learners about their friends and family and their reading habits, as well as their teachers at school. The “You and your reading” questionnaire asked learners about their reading
habits, i.e. what they read, how often they read, whether they belong to and go to a library and what they think about reading in general.

The responses to the questionnaires were quite surprising. For instance, the learners who completed the questionnaires indicated that they are better readers then we as teachers think they are. The learners were also most positive about reading and the benefits that they could gain from reading. This was also surprising to us. Magazines were indicated as the most popular reading material and most learners responded that they read at least once a week, but that they needed more time to read. They also indicated that their mothers played the most important role in encouraging them to read and most admitted that they read because they were forced to read by their teachers or parents. What was again surprising to us was, when asked if they thought that their teachers think they read well, that most responded with “I don’t know”.

This questionnaire survey was most revealing in that learners seemed to have different perceptions about their reading and reading in general to that of the teachers at the school. As mentioned earlier, the teachers’ perceptions were that the learners were largely poor readers who did not read much outside of school and that therefore they had a somewhat negative attitude to reading, but the survey results indicate that learners are in fact more positively inclined towards reading.

Having gathered our baseline data, we used the results to guide our actions. We set aside two periods per week for silent reading. Once again, we were surprised by our learners as a number of them brought books from home to read during these periods. It was also apparent that a number of learners had obtained their books from public libraries. During these periods, learners were not only encouraged to read on their own, but time was also set aside to discuss the books they were reading, or in some cases teachers read stories or parts of novels to the learners. These reading periods have been made an official item in the timetable and are now a part of school life.
The next action was to re-activate the library which had become a store room. We cleared out the room and packed the books neatly onto the shelves and then placed gymnastic mats on the floor for the learners to sit on while they are reading. A lot more still has to be done to refurbish the library. We need to get rid of old and irrelevant books and obtain new books which the learners will be interested in; we need to set up a catalogue system so that learners can take out books from the library; and we need to have newspapers and magazines available to learners in the library. However, clearing out the library and making it available to learners has contributed to raising awareness about reading. We also want to set up individual classroom libraries, but we need the financial resources to obtain books for them.

We also attempted to promote reading in the school in a variety of ways, so as to instil a culture of reading in the school environment. In order to do this, we constantly reminded the teachers about the importance of promoting reading in their classes. Another way we tried to promote reading was to set up a “Reading Board” (see photo alongside) on a wall near the tuck shop. The Action Research project leader put up the disused notice board and then put a copy of a cover of a book he was reading, as well as a review of the book. He invited responses to his review and asked learners what they were reading. Soon the Reading Board began to attract some interest from the learners.

Eventually one learner approached the project leader and told him she was an avid reader of Ken Follet novels which her teacher had introduced her to. He encouraged her to write a review of the novel she had just read and gave her a copy
of a magazine article on Ken Follett to read. She wrote her review of the novel and it was then placed on the Reading Board along with a copy of the cover of the book and the magazine article. This attracted the attention of other learners who indicated that they also wanted to write reviews of books they are reading to be placed on the Reading Board. The Reading Board and the process of up-dating it has also captured the attention of teachers. In future, book reviews by teachers and even the principal will be placed on the Reading Board.

**How do we know that we have improved the situation?**

Owing to the fact that we have the two reading periods every week, we now see learners walking around with books which they either got from home, or from a public library. Teachers at the school have also begun to provide positive comments regarding the fact that the learners have books and are reading more than before. The reading periods have therefore exposed the learners to reading and have encouraged them to bring books to school. They have also made us realise that more learners read than what we had originally thought.

The reading survey we conducted helped to raise awareness about the importance of reading and also provided us with valuable information which has helped to change our sometimes negative perceptions about our learners and their attitudes to reading.

We have also re-activated the library which is no longer a store room. However, as mentioned above, we need to purchase books which will be more relevant to the lives of the learners and we need to set up systems so that learners can take out books.
Our attempt to promote reading in the school by setting up a Reading Board has been relatively successful to date. The Reading Board has attracted responses from some learners and has captured the interest of a number of learners who read it during break times.

We are pleased with the response to our actions and think that we are making an important contribution towards instilling a culture of reading in our school and thereby improving our learners’ educational opportunities. Our value of helping every learner to reach their potential is thus being realised in a small way each day. We are also motivated by our success in this venture and can sense the excitement among our colleagues also.

**What have we learnt from our research intervention?**

With regard to the implementation of the project, we have learnt that adopting a formal and structured approach may not necessarily lead to successful implementation of the project and attainment of our aim – to get our learners to read more. Rather, the action that did not require learners to respond, that gave them a choice in the matter, has sparked the interest in reading that we were striving for. The introduction of the Reading Board and the invitation to respond seems to have sparked much interest among learners and teachers. This was done because the committee leader found it difficult to obtain teacher commitment to attendance at meetings. It is difficult to get teachers to attend committee meetings at our school mainly because of time constraints. It has taught us that often the most simple actions, done out of a sense of not knowing what else to do, can have huge impacts.

However, the implementation of our project relied mostly on one teacher, a Life Sciences Teacher who has the responsibility of teach Grade 12 learners. If more teachers are actively involved in the implementation of the project to promote reading at our school, the greater success we will have. But, there will always be the issue of time. Teachers have enough on their plates and therefore it is difficult to find the time to implement projects of this nature. This makes us think that we need to find more ways to pique the interest of learners, so that they can take the project further, rather than relying on overburdened teachers. The response to the Reading Board, has led us to believe that perhaps we should ask the learners to set up a Book Club or some similar project.
The project has always enjoyed the support of the principal and management team of the school which is a most positive factor and bodes well for the future.

We always believed a more structured team approach, involving more teachers, would be needed to attain success, but perhaps we have to give over more control to learners, thereby living out our value of inclusion and belief in the ability of learners. Due to the non-participation of teachers and the committee’s controlling role, the values of participation and democracy in action research were not fully adhered to in this stage of the project, which will be on-going. In future, our aim will be to ensure that they are. However, we did learn that sometimes we need to “go with the flow” in the action research process as it does not always follow a pre-destined plan.

The project changed our perceptions about our learners and their reading. We found that more learners read than what we originally thought, that our learners do have access to books and that a number of them belong to public libraries. We also found that learners have a better perception of themselves as readers than teachers do and that they have a more positive attitude to reading than we originally thought. Learners are also aware of the positive benefits of reading, something we thought they were not aware of. We therefore learnt that we should not always make assumptions about our learners. We need to carry out research in order to find out what is really the case.

We also learnt that doing simple informal things such as setting up the Reading Board can spark interest in and enthusiasm for reading. Setting up reading periods was formal and structured, but may not have created the interest and enthusiasm we strove for.

We are now also aware that change is a slow process. For instance teachers are at different stages in the process of promoting reading and need to be constantly reminded about the importance of emphasising and raising awareness of reading in their classes. We also have to be diligent in maintaining interest in and enthusiasm for reading. For example, we need to ensure that we change the book reviews on the Reading Board every week to maintain interest and enthusiasm.

Above all, we need to get books into our learners’ hands by acquiring more books for our library that are attractive to teenagers and that speak to their lives. We have also learnt that magazines are popular, so we need to get more of these to get learners used to reading. Maybe the next step
will be to establish a book club? The possibilities are endless and we are excited about the opportunity to change the culture regarding reading in our school.
ADDRESSING THE LATE-COMING OF LEARNERS

Woolhope Secondary School

AJ Jaram, L Yoyo, ZB Jaram, N Botha and V Govindasamy

Our context

Woolhope Secondary School was established in 1969 in the suburb of Malabar, following the forced removal of people of colour from the previously non-racial suburb of South End, Port Elizabeth, by the then Apartheid government as part of its racially separatist policy. As a result, so-called “coloured” residents were moved to areas such as Gelvandale, Korsten, and Chatty in the northern areas of the city; Chinese people were moved to Kabega Park, in the western suburbs, people of Indian descent to Malabar (between the western suburbs and the northern areas), and black people to townships situated on the outskirts of the city. Woolhope Secondary School was therefore established primarily for the people of Indian descent who now were forced to live in the suburb of Malabar. Initially it catered for both primary and secondary school learners, but became a secondary school after the establishment of Malabar Primary School in the suburb of Malabar.

Following the collapse of the Apartheid government, the separatist Group Areas Act was no longer enforced. Consequently, learners from outside the suburb of Malabar began to attend the school. Many of these learners came from the former “coloured” area of Gelvandale, as well as the former “black” areas of the city. Most of these learners were sent here by their parents because they believed that they would get a better education and therefore improve their life chances. While the school is situated in a relatively affluent part of the suburb of Malabar, most of the learners come from less affluent communities.

Woolhope Secondary School has a long and proud tradition, with many of its graduates achieving success in their careers. It is also a relatively well-resourced school, mainly due to fund-raising efforts and an active and supportive alumni association. It is a co-ed school with learners from many cultures and religions.
Our concern

As mentioned above, in recent years at Woolhope Secondary School there has been an influx of many learners from outside the suburb of Malabar. Most of these learners (nearly 70% of the total number of learners at the school) find their way to school either by bus, taxi, their own transport (including parents), or in lift clubs, while those learners who live in or near the suburb of Malabar usually walk to school. The Department of Education has also provided subsidies for learners who come from the former “black” areas, which are situated some distance away. The transport situation, along with other factors that result in late-coming to school, ultimately leads to learners missing out on instruction in the classroom. Furthermore, learners are frequently late for lessons, both after break times and between lessons. This is very disruptive and results in learners sometimes missing parts of lessons.

In doing this action research project, we therefore wanted to answer the following questions:

*How can we decrease the rate of learner late-coming to school?*

*How can we decrease the rate of learner late-coming to lessons?*

Why are we concerned?

The fact that learners arrive late at school and for lessons is not consistent with the values of responsibility and respect which are important at our school. We want learners to become responsible citizens, who care for others and respect their needs. Learners should learn to take responsibility for their own actions and to make plans to overcome factors outside of their control. For instance, they need to learn problem solving skills to address their transport issues. Furthermore, late-coming means that learners are late for school and therefore for classes which leads to the disruption of lessons and the work schedule. This is disrespectful to educators and to their fellow learners.
What we did to improve the situation

The first thing we did was to conduct research to find out why learners were late for school and for lessons, and to determine the extent of the problem of late-coming. We also decided to limit our focus to a random sample of the following subjects:

- Learners who are common, or habitual late-comers both to school and to lessons
- Late-comers who live nearby the school
- Drivers of mini-bus taxis that are frequently late for school

In order to collect the information we needed, we developed a report form to record learners who were late for school and for lessons and their reasons for being late. We also developed an interview questionnaire to use when interviewing mini-bus taxi drivers. The process of collecting information involved in-depth interviews and observations of the late-coming of learners and taxi drivers. The interviews were semi-structured, open ended and conversational, with educators taking down notes.

In order to gather information about learners getting to lessons late, monitors were appointed to note down the learners that were late for class and their reasons for being late for a period of two consecutive weeks. The educators in charge of the project would identify which learners are bunking, taking time to smoke, the common periods that they bunk or come late and the time that the learners got to the classrooms.

With regard to gathering information about late-coming to school, a monitor was appointed to wait at the front of the school gate before school started at 7.50am and then close the school gates at 8.00am. The late-coming of learners from 8.00 to 8.15am would then be noted, as well as their reasons for being late.

A similar procedure was followed to gather information about mini-bus taxis that were late. The number of mini-bus taxis that were late was counted, as well as the number of learners who were late as a result of the mini-bus taxi being late. The learners were also questioned as to why they were late, as were the mini-bus taxi drivers who also completed a questionnaire.
After collecting and analysing the information that the monitors of the classes had collected, we noticed that the same learners were bunking and/or were late for classes and that the same learner or learners bunked the same period. We also found that the time that learners were late for class ranged from 5 to 10 minutes.

However, we also found out that the reason why some learners were late for lessons was because some teachers were sending them out of their class – i.e. they were refusing to allow latecomers to attend class, some learners were doing errands for teachers and some learners doing catch up work for the next period. An unexpected outcome of monitoring learners’ late arrival for lessons was that soon the learners began to question teachers who arrived late for their lessons by enquiring as to why they were late. This was an indication that our investigating late-coming to lessons had raised awareness of late-coming amongst the learners.

The most significant aspect we discovered was that the same learners who were late for lessons, or simply bunched them, performed very poorly in their school work and contributed to the failure rate of the school. Furthermore, their late-coming led them to be inattentive and passive participants in the lessons. In addition, as mentioned above, we found that learners who were late for lessons took approximately 5 – 10 minutes to get to the next class. This indicated that they went for a ‘cigarette smoking break’. Also, the fact that some educators would take more than the allocated minutes per lesson period would result in the learner being late for the next period. Consequently, the whole school timetable becomes disrupted and congested and results in learners are not being taught for the full duration of a lesson. The observation that some learners bunk the same lessons for the same educator or learning area, indicates that they don’t like the educator, or did not do the homework for the lesson.

With regard to the mini-bus taxis arriving late, we found that money was an issue for the mini-bus taxi drivers as they have to meet a certain figure for the day for the taxi owner and then the

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rest of the money belongs to them. Therefore, their aim is to fill their taxi to capacity to make their trip profitable and they also pick up other passengers on the way when bringing learners to our school. Taxis also have a set route to follow, resulting in too many stops on their way to school. All of these factors result in time being wasted on their way to our school. An additional problem highlighted by the mini-taxi drivers is that learners do not necessarily board mini-bus taxis that are ready to leave from taxi ranks or stops. Instead they wait and choose which minibus-taxi they want to ride it. The most popular choices are mini-bus taxis that have flashy decorations on the bodywork, as well as elaborate and loud sound systems which play the music that the learners like.

Learners arrive at school late in the mornings for a variety of reasons, such as oversleeping, getting up late, parent delays at home, public transport delays, choosing taxis that they like and detours whilst walking. Late-coming also occurs due to factors associated with socio-economic status and disrupted patterns at home. Ironically, records of the late arrival of learners at school in the morning indicated that many of the learners who arrive late actually live in the Malabar suburb. Therefore, apart from public transport problems, our investigations revealed that late-coming resulted from firstly, learners lack of personal responsibility, i.e. oversleeping, not getting ready in time and secondly, lack of parental supervision/support – many parents leave for work before children have to leave for school, or parents do not respect the school timetable.

From this cycle of research, we therefore uncovered some information that we were not aware of and that will help us to address the problem. It also alerted us to the fact that we cannot assume that the late coming is due to transport problems, as we previously thought.

To address the late-coming of learners, we decided to punish late-comers by getting them to do community service, for example, getting them to pick up the garbage in and around the school grounds. Although the learners did not really like doing community service of this nature, many were light-hearted about it.
Learners performing their community service as punishment for late coming

How do we know that we have improved the situation?

The monitoring of late-coming to school in the morning, as well as the monitoring of learners’ arriving late at lessons has certainly raised awareness about late-coming in our school. Furthermore, the fact that learners began to question teachers about their being late for lessons is an indication of the level of awareness raised and hopefully this will result in educators coming to class on time. We have also communicated to the staff that they should not put learners out of their classrooms when they come late, as this only makes the situation worse.

The number of late comers has decreased, mainly because learners do not want to have to do community service. However, we need to work more on this problem and address the attitude of the learners who are late due to their own lack of responsibility. This will be our next focus.

What have we learnt from our research intervention?

In conducting and action research project of this nature we have learnt that it cannot be successfully implemented unless the senior management of the school is involved in the implementation team. For most of 2010, we floundered about and made very little progress with various members of staff attending the training and sharing sessions at the University. However, as soon as senior management became involved the project gained focus and implementation
improved dramatically. We also realised that we need to work as a team and that the whole school has to buy-in to a project of this nature. Unfortunately, we only realised this late in this study.

We have also learnt that the socio-economic problems that our learners experience contribute to their late coming – they live under difficult circumstances and do not always have parental support. Late-coming is only a symptom of a deeper problem. Owing to the fact that we interacted more closely with learners, parents, and taxi operators, it enhanced our mutual relationship and raised late-coming as a mutual concern. We therefore need to work more closely with parents to try and find workable solutions to this problem and with taxi operators – we need to partner with each other and live out the values we want our children to emulate.

Learners, especially those living near the school, are late because of their own behaviour or perhaps due to their parents’ behaviour and this needs to be investigated and worked on. Those travelling by taxi are more at the mercy of the taxi drivers, therefore we need to work on this issue and ensure that public transport becomes more reliable. In this first step of the process, we have succeeded in raising awareness about the problem and in unearthing some issues that we were previously not aware of.

We learnt that we have to continue to work on cultivating a climate where respect and responsibility are lived out – perhaps punishment is not the best method for a lasting solution to this problem. Learners would benefit more by learning how to solve problems, take responsibility and have respect for the needs of others. Action research provides us with the tool to take this issue further – it opens up the real reasons for problems so that workable solutions can be found.

We fully acknowledge that our project was not as advanced as it should have been, because we did not live out the values of participation, inclusion, and democracy in this project. No one in the team took responsibility for it, and therefore not much could happen. However, when school management realised this and became involved, we were able to do a great deal in a short time. This has convinced us that, if we follow the process of action research and live out the values underpinning it, we can achieve much in the future. We are now committed to taking this action further since our learning in this project has motivated us to take control of the issues that negatively impinge on the quality of education in our school.
ANNEXURE F: QUESTIONNAIRE

DG MULLAY ACTION RESEARCH FOR WHOLE SCHOOL DEVELOPMENT

Please answer the following questions in as much detail as you can:

1. How has participation in this project affected:

   You personally in your capacity as a school leader?

   The school as a whole (practical issues, climate, environment etc.)
2. In terms of the action research intervention:

What are your impressions of action research as a methodology to improve school problems?

What did you find difficult about this methodology?
What further help would you need in terms of using this kind of methodology in the future to continue school improvement?

3. What have you learnt as a result of participating in this project? (about yourself, your leadership, your colleagues, etc.)
4. You identified some values to guide your intervention at the beginning.

What were these values – explain how each one could ideally be enacted/lived out on a daily basis? (e.g. responsibility – each person in the school would take responsibility for keeping the school tidy)

Explain how the intervention encouraged these values to be lived out or explain the barriers you came across in terms of trying to encourage people to live them out.
5. Any other comments?